A NOBLE VINE

REV. J. JACKSON WRAY.

Cogry Memorial P.S.S.

To

Agnes Wilson

for

good attendance

during

1924

A NOBLE VINE.

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A NOBLE VINE;

OR,

Practical Thoughts

ON

OUR LORD'S LAST PARABLE.

BY

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"NESTLETON MAGNA," "MATTHEW MELLOWDEW," "PAUL MEGGITT'S DELUSION," "PETER PENGELLY," ETC. ETC. ETC.

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JOHN XV. 1–8.

"I am the True Vine."

"My Father is the Husbandman."

"Ye are the Branches."

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit."

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A NOBLE VINE.

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The Prelude.

SURELY nothing that was ever said or done on this earth can at all compare in sweet and touching tenderness, in divinely human interest and beauty, in all that takes hold upon whatever is best in man for good, with the record of the last days of the life of our blessed Lord and Saviour. As we follow Him, hour by hour, from the eve of the Passover to the ninth hour on the Cross, through all the sadly sweet and strangely thrilling scenes of the upper room, of Olivet, of Gethsemane, of Calvary, even until He is hidden from our view in the garden of the grave, we feel that although the awful shadow of the Cross falls darkly on His soul, yet every word He uttered is warm with human sympathy, and every deed He did presents the Man before us as the Friend and Brother, as well as the Redeemer of mankind.

Especially is this true of His tender talk with His disciples during the Last Supper, and after the betrayer had gone from them to set in motion the plot which resulted in His death. The departure of the little band from that hallowed "guest-chamber," did not, for more than a moment, interrupt the flow of gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth, nor check the current of counsel, comfort and good cheer that poured from His lips, to strengthen the hearts of His followers, and to prepare and fortify them for the struggle—the overwhelming trial which He knew to be nigh at hand.

It seems to us, the while we read the thrilling story, as if He felt that by instructing others, those whom the Father had given Him, He could best retain and increase His own strength of heart and calm of mind for the coming conflict in the shadows of Gethsemane; shadows which even now were projecting their awful and mysterious gloom along His darkening path; shadows which He knew portended a night in which the "pains of hell" should get "hold upon" Him and bring Him "trouble and sorrow" without a name.

Then, as now, as it is with the servant, so was it with their Lord,—the Friend was befriended by His friendliness; the Consoler was soothed by the

consolations He administered to others; the wounded Spirit was healed by the balsam He poured into hearts less sorrowful than His own; the load of the Burdened One was lightened by bearing others' burdens; the Strengthener was strengthened by making others strong.

"O helpful One!
Thou, too, wast helpèd in that hour of gloom;
The light that shone
From Thee on Thine, Thy pathway to the tomb
Did shine upon;
As flowers exhale their scent, display their bloom
Alike for him that hath, and him from whom
The gift hath gone."

Among the many gracious words last spoken by our Lord on the evening of the Agony, are those in which the Peerless Teacher told to His disciples the parable of the vine. This was His last parable. Was it not the sum and substance of all His parables? Was it not intended by the sacred Speaker to have all the peculiar force which attaches to dying words? Was it not meant to be a precious, inspiring, and abiding memento of Him for all whom the Father hath given Him out of the world?

This remarkable utterance, this pearl of parables,

so rife with wisdom, so rich in beauty, so replete with instruction, and so fragrant with exceeding tenderness and love, invites prayerful and perpetual study. It defies exhaustion, and warrants every attempt to develop its meaning, to discover more and more its wealth of beauty from new aspects, to evolve its numerous solemn yet cheering lessons, and to extract more fully the high and holy inspirations which a devout and thoughtful study of it is certain to supply. The saying of the old Puritan prophet, that "the Lord will yet make more light and truth to break forth from His Holy Word," is true of all its wondrous pages, is very true of this beautiful parable of the vine.

"Earth hath nothing fair,
Nothing sweet or rare;
But as I look, before my eyes
Visions of my Lord arise.
Nature's glories show
Him who made them so.

"Life hath nothing bright,
Hath no real delight;
But in it all my Lord I see
Revealing still Himself to me.
And life's blessings show
Him who made them so.

"In His gracious Word,
I my gracious Lord
Would ever see more clearly still,
More fully, clearly know His will.
Live His will, and show
Him who made me so.

"Show me, Saviour mine,
In this mystic Vine,
What life and love Thou hast for me :
Thyself herein I fain would see,
And grow, while looking, like to Thee ;
Then to all men show
Him who made me so."

The Parable.

THERE is much difference of opinion as to the exact circumstances under which the words of this parable came to be spoken. Some have imagined that Jesus still sat with His disciples at the supper-table, and that, as it was the universal custom on festival occasions to adorn the houses with the branches of the vine, the parable was thus suggested to His mind.

Others again have thought that the Passover-cup, held in the Saviour's hand, supplied Him with so apt a text; while others, by a singular stretch of fancy, have seen the prompting idea in the portals of the Temple, whose imposing gates were adorned with carven vine branches, with sculptured leaves, and with grapes of gold.

There is another possible explanation of the origin of this parable (if indeed explanation is needed) which is much more natural and beautiful. Having finished His gracious discourse in the "guest-

chamber," Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us go hence." They sang a hymn, we are told, and then repaired to the Mount of Olives. Into a quiet and secluded part of that "green hill" it was the custom of the Master to conduct His disciples for restful pause —welcome release from the perpetual pressure of the crowd—for private converse and for secret prayer. It was a place hallowed alike to Him and them; and after such a service as they had just engaged in, it was but natural that they should seek that quiet and calm retreat.

It was the constant practice of the Great Teacher in His discourses, alike to the disciples and the multitude, to point to some natural object near at hand, to press that into His service and to employ it to illustrate and to simplify the lessons which He taught. The bending lily blooming in lowly loveliness hard by the paths He trod; the birds that twittered on the eaves or circled in the air overhead; the fig-tree putting forth its fair young leaves at the bidding of the spring; the grass of the field gemmed with flowers or browning for the oven; the corn, ripe to whiteness and ready for the scythe; the reddening sky to westward that gave promise of a fair to-morrow; all these and many more were in turn employed by Him who spake as never man

spake, to impress upon His hearers' minds the truths, divinest truths, which with tireless, tender, patient iteration He taught them day by day.

Herein, surely, as in all things else, our Exemplar hath left us an example that we may follow in His steps. To this day the teacher can find no simpler or more effective expositor than Nature; the young, the old, the learned, and the ignorant are alike amenable to its voice, and when the books of Nature and of Revelation are read together, when the one is studied in the light of the other, the truest wisdom is revealed in the clearest guise. Then, Wordsworth's lines are true indeed—

> "One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can."

Thomas Carlyle calls nature "the time-vesture of God, that reveals Him to the wise and hides Him from the foolish." This is perfectly true, but then, alas, the sage as usual forgets to tell his disciples how the wisdom which may discover God through the vesture is to come. He who seeks it in the pages of the inspired Volume, and from the Well-spring, himself shall—

"Genuine wisdom learn.
Yonder see that bush of roses;
How before thee it doth burn,
Like the burning bush of Moses.
Hearken then, and thou shalt hear,
If thy soul's not deaf or flighty,
How from out it, soft and clear,
Speaks to thee the Lord Almighty."

Nearly the whole pathway from the upper room where they had kept their Passover, to the green suburban slopes to which they were now going, lay through a succession of vineyards—a scene of beauty and delight. On either side of the embowered way the graceful vines were growing; some were creeping along the ground, some were twining around supporting poles, or around the trunk and boughs of convenient trees, while others were trellised to rude lattices, according to the cultivator's taste and skill. Possibly the expanding foliage half concealed the young clusters which gave promise of the purple riches which in due time would reward the toil of the husbandman, and stain the garments of the merry youths employed in treading out the grapes.

It was the Saviour's habit to talk and teach as He walked along. Passing "through the cornfields," or across the furrowed glebe where the "sower" had

gone "forth to sow," or along the highway under shade of fig-tree or sycamine, He taught as He travelled, and turned His journeying hours to doubly wise account. It is more than likely, therefore, that as He and His disciples sauntered along the green arcades, the young vine-leaves brushing their garments as they passed, the Teacher found His suggestive text, and from the vines then present to the eye, taught of spiritual life, of soul-growth, of divine culture and of holy fruit.

"I am the true Vine and My Father is the Husbandman. . . . I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

It is a beautiful figure. From the Master's lips, and pictured in the Master's language, it is incomparably beautiful, and is laden with lessons of highest meaning, redolent with grace and truth and love. As I have said, it is the last of the numberless parables which left His sacred lips; and being spoken when the immediate shadow of the Cross lay dark upon His path, there is a peculiarly sweet and touching pathos in it, which must impress upon the hearts and minds of them that love Him the vital life-lessons which it contains.

Oh, for the Spirit of life and light to "take of"

these "things of" Christ "and show them unto us," that their beauties may be revealed, that their holy teachings may be unfolded and applied!

Fain would we learn, O Noble Vine!
Thy nature know, Thy beauties trace;
And understand each mystic sign,
And all the vital truth embrace;
Until our souls with love are rife,
Grafted into Thy glorious life!

Come, O Thou south wind! Wake, O north!
Bid the sweet fragrance now come forth,
Breathe, Breath of God; Good Spirit blow!
Make from "this Vine" the spices flow.
Our hearts instruct, our mind illume,
And bless us with the rich perfume!

While here expectant we recline
Beneath the shadow of the Vine,
O gracious Spirit, kind and true!
Send Thou Thy sunlight streaming through;
And help us in the Vine, to trace
His love, our life, the Father's grace.

THE VINE.

"Deep strike thy roots, O heavenly Vine!
Within our earthly sod,
Most human and yet most divine,
The flower of man and God."

—WHITTIER.

THE VINE.

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I.

LIFE.

In the plan of this parable the Teacher assigns to the Father the cultivation of the Vine, the office of the husbandman. To His disciples He apportions the branches, the leafage, and the fruit: Jesus Christ Himself therefore is the vital stock. The root and stem of the "pleasant plant" are intended to represent what He is unto all "them that believe on His name." These define the relation in which He stands, alike to the individual believer and to the whole body of redeemed ones, of which His Church consists, and of whom He speaks in marvellous complacency of love as "those whom the Father hath given Me."

From the root, and through the stem of the vine proceed all the living, quickening and expand-

ing forces that make the tree a thing of beauty, life and fruit. Herefrom and hereby alone, come growth and foliage, blossom and grapes. What that subtle force in the vine is that we call life, the keenest scientific skill can neither discover nor explain. But we know that it has its place of power, and exerts its secret strength among the hidden portions of the tree which lie beneath the soil. We know, that like the flimsy blades of corn that mocked the sower's hopes on "stony ground," if it come to have no root, it must "wither away."

From the root comes life, in the root is life, and from the root comes food and nourishment to sustain the life. The furthest twig, the uttermost leaflet, as well as the larger branches with their rush of leaves, has each a pulse of life set in motion, and kept in action by direct communication with the living parent root-pulse down below. Without the root both the lesser and the greater could do nothing, nothing but fail and wither and die.

The Divine lesson taught herein is clear, definite, and complete. The Christian's life, the life that hath come to the soul, once dead in trespasses and sins, is "hidden in Christ." The indwelling force, the potent mystery, the vital secret that makes him

alive to God, is the quickening presence and all-pervading influence of the Spirit of Christ. "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given the Son to have life in Himself, and the Son quickeneth whom He will." That is to say, This Divine Root hath the Father planted in the dry ground of our humanity, in order that He may "give life unto all them that believe;" a life which is divine, a life which inspires, purifies, beautifies and fructifies the soul, and which for ever expands and strengthens without limitation and without ultimate decay. That this life might be ours, that it might be in us, that having it we might live in the light and love of God for ever, Jesus died! On the cross of death He regained for us the lapsed and forfeited crown of life. Golgotha and the grave were entered for us by our Immanuel, and out of them He brought for us a resurrection glory; because He lives, we shall live also, shall live by Him, live in Him, live with Him, the risen Christ!

O sacred cross! O tree of death!
O cross with sorrow rife!
On thee Christ yielded up His breath;
I come the burdened cross beneath
And find—the Tree of Life!

O crown of thorns! O crown of death!
Christ wore that crown for me;
"I suffered this for thee," He saith,
I cry, "O Lord, increase my faith!"
And lo! the thorns become my wreath
Of immortality!

O sepulchre! O grave's dark gloom!
A dead Christ lies within!
Faith enters at the angel's Come!
Lo! vacant ledge and empty tomb!
And yonder, 'mid the garden's bloom,
Christ walks, who bravely dared the doom
My life in Him to win!

O Tree of Life! O Root Divine!
Engraft me into Thee!
Dead to myself, Thy life be mine,
A living branch in Living Vine;
O may our life so intertwine
To all eternity!

II.

ABUNDANT LIFE.

And withal, what a source of life our Redeemer is! The Root of this Vine strikes right down into the very centre of Omnipotence. It spreads itself throughout all the attributes of the Deity, and gathers for all its branches perfect and boundless supplies from thence! "It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." He can therefore give supremest good, perfect and all-inclusive life to every soul throughout all the wide world of men, and down through all the ages; full measure, pressed down and running over, of life and health and peace.

> Its roots through all the Godhead reach,
> So plenteous is the store;
> Life, bounteous life, for all and each,
> And life for evermore!

"He came that we might have life." O marvellous coming! O matchless mystery of that stoop!

He came from heaven to earth, exchanged the crown of the Godhead for the cross of shame, the highest glory for the lowest grave! He carried our sorrows, and bare our griefs, and died in lonesomeness and darkness, "that we might have life, *and that we might have it more abundantly;*" to more glorious issues, to richer developments, to more transcendent powers, to a diviner altitude of experiences than even the unfallen Adam was possessed of, before ever the flaming sword expelled him from Eden, and repelled him from all approach to its central tree.

In our fallen and undone condition, in our low and lost estate, while we were without strength, dead in trespasses and sins, cast out as a lopped and broken branch, "God gave to us eternal life, and that life is in His Son," and is to be had no otherwhere in all the universe besides; "he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son, hath not life." There is the simple truth, and it cannot be gainsaid: whatever else he hath within the wide sweep of all possible attainments, of all that this world holds, of all that human hearts can wish for, without Christ he hath nothing; without Christ,—apart from the living Root, man is morally dead and possesses nothing, really, no

more than a dead man does—dead as the orchard boughs that strew the ground, and long since snapped asunder from the parent tree by some resistless storm. The soul who is a stranger to spiritual life may say to the true believer, with more truth than he can fathom,

> "Life with you
> Glows in the brain and dances in the arteries;
> 'Tis like the wine some joyous guest hath quaffed,
> That glads the heart and elevates the fancy:
> Mine is the poor residuum of the cup,
> Vapid and dull and tasteless; only soiling
> With its base dregs the vessel that contains it."

The true enjoyment of life is impossible so long as the heart has no anchor on Divine truth, and the soul no experimental knowledge of God as the Father, Saviour, Comforter and Hope. Hence it is that so many of the "lovers of this world" bear melancholy witness of life when they have extracted all its little store of sweets. Take one testimony out of a thousand:—

> "Life is a weary interlude,
> Which doth short joys, long woes include;
> The world, the stage, the prologue tears;
> The acts, vain hopes, and varied fears;
> The scene shuts up with loss of breath,
> And leaves no epilogue but death."

What a satire is this on all the so-called "pleasures of the drama" on which the lines are founded. The theatre may, and no doubt does lead to such a pitiful issue of thought and feeling; but the sanctuary and the Book, with their revelation of "life in Christ" of the "vital Gift of God," inspire no dirge over blasted hopes and sad retrospections like that, but prompt the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, which are burdened with gratitude, melodious with happiness, and redolent of hope. This is more the measure of the Christian's life-pulse :—

"My God, I thank Thee who hast made
The earth so bright;
So full of splendour and of joy,
Beauty and light;
So many glorious things are here,
Noble and right.

"I thank Thee, too, that Thou hast made
Joy to abound;
So many gentle thoughts and deeds
Circling us round,
That in the darkest spot of earth
Some love is found.

"I thank Thee *more* that all our joy
Is touched with pain;
That shadows fall on brightest hours;
That thorns remain;
So that earth's bliss may be our guide,
And not our chain.

"For Thou, who knowest, Lord, how soon
Our weak heart clings,
Hast given us joys, tender and true,
Yet all with wings,
So that we see, gleaming on high,
Diviner things.

"I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast kept
The best in store;
We have enough, yet not too much
To long for more;
A yearning for a deeper peace,
Not known before.

"I thank Thee, Lord, that here our souls,
Though amply blest,
Can never find, although they seek,
A perfect rest,—
Nor ever shall, until they lean
On Jesus' breast."

"Lord, to whom can we go but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life." This ardent question, put by the disciples to their Lord, syllables the felt necessity of the human heart, and has no answer but that which their faith and hope in Him enabled them to give. He, and He only, hath the words of life; He hath not only the words, but the power. "All power," said He, "is given to Me in heaven and in earth." He hath the power to undo the tremendous damage wrought by sin, power to

revivify our moral manhood, power to breathe into us the breath of life, so that once again we are "living souls." Happy is he and wise who understands this, heartily believes it, humbly accepts it; and having no confidence in the flesh, no resources in himself, no dependence on aught outside the might, the merit, the mercy of his Saviour, comes to Him, believes on Him, yields his whole heart to Him, and finds in Him his all in all. Herein is all we need, for time and for eternity, for body and soul, for basket and store, for family and fortune; all, from a thought of comfort to a throne of glory; all from day to day, from dawn to dark, from now till death; all, from the grave to glory, and through all the cycles of immortality!

All things, life in Christ will bring,
Store of all the heart can need;
Unfolding every precious thing,
Fruit, blossom, leaf and seed.

Apart from Christ, the living Vine,
There's nothing to desire;
Of all besides, e'en were it thine,
Thine heart would only tire.

Apart from Him, there's nought of worth,
Created things are vain;
With Him are glory, grace and wealth,
The highest, richest gain.

With Christ, thy God makes all abound ;
O better far for thee,
Than all the wealth that can be found
In earth, or air, or sea.

In Him is life, in life is love,
In love is all beside ;
And earth beneath and heaven above
Are thine, through Christ that died.

Of all the gifts that God can send,
That can to thee befall,
The Gift of gifts is Christ thy Friend,
For with Him thou hast all.

III.

STABILITY.

THE root of the vine is not only the source of life and nourishment, but it gives also stability and fixity to the tree, and therefore also to every branch united to the central stem. It is a definite and abiding anchorage. Holding fast by the solid earth in which it lies embedded, the root secures a settled and unchanging dwelling-place for all the growth above. Whatsoever storm and strife of wind and weather may shake and toss the branches to and fro, there is a limit beyond which they cannot pass—"Thus far shalt thou go and no farther," says the strong resisting root, and holds the tree firmly in its place of rest.

I have heard of the existence of a singular vegetable production, said to be found in certain desert regions, which has no rootage whatsoever. It expands and grows, in globular form, by the outward agency of sun, and rain, and dew, together

with such haphazard nourishment as it may at times obtain by simple contact with the earth. But the strange waif and stray has no root-hold, no abiding-place. It is driven across the wilderness, to and fro, hither and thither, at the mercy of every foot that passes and of every wind that blows.

That may be a sufficiently appropriate illustration of the state and condition of a soul out of Christ, a stranger to the settling and contenting power of saving faith in God. He is said to be "like the troubled sea that cannot rest;" he is at the mercy of every wayward wind of passion, the sport of change and circumstance; being driven through all sorts of dry places by ill-directed impulses, by strong gusts of temptation, by the chopping winds of varying fortune, by the stern compulsion of unsatisfied longings, and everywhere, and all the time, he is "seeking rest and finding none." "I have seen the wicked in great power," says the Psalmist, "and spreading himself like a green bay tree." But with whatever spread of branches, whatever freshness of foliage, whatever of seeming power, he had no root! Hence the Psalmist proceeds to say of him;—"yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found."

In his first pure and sinless state man had perfect rest in God his Maker and his Life. Then he was rooted and grounded in Him, and in the Lord Jehovah was his everlasting strength. From that firm homestead sin plucked him away, lopped him from his Divine life-source, expelled him from Eden, banished him from God. He became a homeless, lawless, restless wanderer, the prey of a hunger that cannot be sated, a thirst that cannot be quenched, weary longings of the heart that cannot be met. Deluded by baseless hopes that can never know fruition, the soul engages in a blind and perpetual search after a subtle something it has lost. Only too ready to listen to any voices that promise "any good," he flits hither and thither like a feather, and has swift alternations of pleasure and despair, up and down like the vagaries of an elastic ball; and like it only becomes quiescent to be sent forward with accelerated speed. So writes the poet,—

> "Day and night my toils redouble,
> Never nearer to the goal;
> Night and day I feel the trouble
> Of the wanderer in my soul."

And so he tries a thousand paths, climbs laborious

hills, crosses barren plains, enters enticing valleys, makes perpetual pilgrimage to vaunted shrines of promise; and evermore he turns from each with weary foot, with sick and aching heart, to tread the disappointing and deceptive round again. Hearken, "O weary souls, that wander wide from the central point of bliss!" In Christ alone is to be found true satisfaction and repose. He is the only root that holds, He is the only rest that abides; He is the only anchor that never gives way! Cease, O mortal, thy vain voyaging on a useless quest. Explore no more the frigid zone of reason and icy cold philosophies; search no more among the tropic flowers that charm the eye in the torrid regions of honour, wealth and pleasure; nor wander among the perilous hills and sombre valleys of speculation,—that land without a sun! In Jesus Christ, the Sun of the Eternal Father, the Omnipotent Brother of humanity, the Man of Calvary, the eternally rooted Vine of God is safety, stability and rest!

A wanderer I;
Beneath the sky
No dwelling-place I found;
All seeming good
I long pursued,
In vain, the wide world round.

Once I was told
To get me gold,
That wealth all good could buy;
The gleaming thing
Took speedy wing
And mocked my eager eye.

Then Pleasure fair,
Enchantments rare
Did promise, rich supplies;
With quick delight
The syren bright
I wooed, and found them—lies.

"Lo good is here!"
"Lo good is there!"
"In yonder secret place!"—
I heard the call,
I followed all,
Alas! the weary chase.

In sore unrest,
With heart unblest,
From life I sought to fly;
"All things are vain,
All good is pain,"
I said, and wished to die.

"Try Christ," said one;
"Try Him alone;
Try faith in Jesus' blood!
He giveth rest!
He gives the best!
He hath the perfect good."

To Christ I went,
And am content,
Here will I aye abide ;
In Him I dwell,
And all is well,
My soul is satisfied.

O living Vine !
Thy life is mine ;
Nor can I e'er remove !
But knit to Thee,
Shall ever be
Deep rooted in Thy love !

IV.

REST.

MAN "never continueth in one stay." These are the weighty and suggestive words which fall on the ear under circumstances solemn enough, surely, to impress upon the mind the lessons they imply. But there is one blessed and delightful exception to the affecting rule. ONE stay man can and does continue in; nor can all the power of Satan, of change and sorrow, of death and judgment, drive him from it; and that stay is Jesus Christ, the Root and Stem of the Father's "Noble Vine." In Him, whosoever is engrafted shall live and abide for ever. Whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall have an everlasting foundation. The wicked may be "driven away;" the ungodly may be "like the chaff;" the sinner may be a "wave of the sea," or "a bird that wandereth from her nest;" but the true believer in Christ abideth for ever, like the "word of the Lord," which is the ground of his con-

fidence and the pillar of his hope. He is steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the conscious possession of a "strong habitation" in Him of whom it is said, "from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God!"

Lord, all my heart is fixed on Thee;
Thou never wilt be far from me
With grace and love divine;
The whole wide world delights me not,
And all its fears affright me not;
Of heaven and earth, Lord, ask I not,
If only Thou art mine!

Safe on Thy power and in Thy love,
My soul doth never wish to rove
From 'neath Thy shade benign;
By living bonds that naught can break,
Thou art my strength, and naught can shake
Me from the living Vine!

This central and eternal hold for souls stands the believer in good stead, and shall for evermore. Neither winter wind nor winter woe can remove him; neither storm of pain nor earthquake of trouble can dislodge him. He is in Christ and shall never be dissatisfied; he is on Christ and shall ever be secure.

It was fabled among the ancients that somewhere amid the overtroubled ocean there was an island,

or islands of the blessed—a land of absolute repose, exempt from storms and brooded over by a halcyon of calm that never for a moment fled away. But, alas! it remained a fable. No adventurous mariner ever happed on it; no longing eye ever caught a glimpse of its peaceful and inviting shores. True rest is only to be found in God. He is the home, the one only home of the soul. To Jesus Christ He hath committed the ministry of reconciliation, so that the soul of man can come to Him again to be lodged in His infinite love, upheld and guarded by His infinite power, and blessed by His favour, bounty, and complacency for ever.

This is the mission of Jesus. This is the errand of our Immanuel to the restless world of men. "Come unto *Me*, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." That is His declaration, a declaration addressed to every sinner without partiality, without exception. In all the wide universe of mind and matter there is none and nothing other that can fulfil that promise. He can and will. "Peace on earth" was promised by the angels when the Holy Child was born; "Peace" was bequeathed to His people by the Saviour ere He died; and "Peace be unto you," was His reiterated benediction when He rose again from the dead. That sense of absolute

security and satisfaction prompted Paul to say in the day of sternest test and fiercest trial, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed unto Him even unto that day." The committal was full, unreserved, complete; the knowledge was clear, contentful and delightsome, and so the soul of the aged apostle, rooted in the love of his Lord, exclaims in triumph,—"I am persuaded that neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord." Reader! is this thy faith? thy confidence? thy joy?

"Root of life, my Lord divine,
Thine I am and Thou art mine,
Naught can part 'twixt Thee and me;
I am Thine, for Thou didst give
Once Thy life that I might live,
Dearly didst Thou purchase me.

"Thou art mine, because my heart
Ne'er will let Thee more depart,
Clings to Thee, her life, her light;
Clasp me still in Thine embrace,
Bring me, bring me to that place
Where life and love are blest with sight.

"In Thy life my life resides,
In Thy love my love abides,
In Thy bliss my soul is blest,
Life, love, bliss, are all my own,
Thou and I, O Lord, are one,
This alone is perfect rest."

V.

SUPPORT.

Not only does the Divine Teacher apportion the root of the vine as a representation of Himself in His relation to the believer, but the stem also, and with equal beauty and suggestiveness of spiritual meaning. The stem of the tree is the strong uplifting and upbearing power which sustains the whole and on which every branch depends. It is the prop and mainstay of the entire, beautiful, natural fabric, and gives to the strongest and the weakest members alike of the widespread brotherhood of boughs an impartial and competent support. True the branches, as we shall come to see by and by, are ever weak and pliant so far as the vine-tree is concerned, and the further and finer they grow are more liable to become drooping and earth-prone, yet their living connection with the stem is their only hope of being lifted and cared for and kept with an upward aim.

Our blessed Lord and Saviour is not only the "ground" of truth, He is the "pillar" and sustainer of whoever is built thereon. The figure of the trunk and its multiplicity of dependent boughs may well lead the Christian to consider his own sole upholding and sustaining strength. By nature he is nothing other, nothing better than a withered bough, blasted by the blight of sin and severed by the blade of retribution from the parent Vine. There he lies prone in the dust, fit only for the fire. Infinite mercy lifts him thence; infinite love grafts him into Christ who henceforth upholds him with His "free spirit," imparts to him His own life, carries him by His sustaining grace, nor ever suffers him to fall.

This condition of absolute reliance and dependence is effectively expressed by Toplady in his immortal hymn:—

"Simply to Thy cross I cling,"

and also in the equally imperishable lines of Charles Wesley:—

"Hangs my helpless soul on Thee,"

both of which describe truthfully and effectively the relation of the branch to the vine-stem, the believer to his Lord.

There are few vital facts connected with experimental and practical religion more liable to be ignored or forgotten than this, and where it is forgotten the results are sad indeed. The human heart is so proud, and the spirit of man is so prone to place its confidence in itself, that they ever need to be brought back to a clear appreciation of the humiliating fact that the human soul is morally "without strength," and that our Saviour's words, spoken in connection with this very parable, are the simple truth all the time,—"without Me ye can do nothing." To this naked truth, this most wholesome conclusion, we must come, if we are to be saved and safe.

"What think you of our need of the Lord Jesus?" said Gotthold: "For my part, my soul is like a hungry and thirsty child, and I need His love and consolation for my refreshment. I am a wandering and lost sheep, and I need Him as a good and faithful Shepherd. I am a feeble vine, and I need His cross to lay hold of, and to wind myself about. I am a sinner, and I need His righteousness for me and in me. I am naked and bare, and I need His innocence and holiness as a covering. I am in trouble and alarm, and I need His sweet solaces and encouragements. I am beset,

behind and before, with enemies, difficulties, straits, and I need His arm to fight. I am ignorant, and I need His teaching; simple and foolish, and I need the guidance of His Spirit. In no situation, and at no time can I do without Him. Do I pray? He must prompt me. Am I in affliction? He must be my helper. Am I persecuted by the world? He must defend me. When I am forsaken He must be my support; when I am dying, who but He can be my life? and when mouldering in the grave He must be my resurrection. O my Saviour! Thou art rich and I am poor. Thou hast abundance, and I am needy. Thou hast wine and oil, and I have wounds. Thou hast cordials and refreshment, and I hunger and droop and faint. Thou art strong, and I am weak. Thou hast all things, I have nothing; Thou art all in all."

This is the true record of every saved sinner, saved into the love and grace of God! And what a "stay" the Lord is! "He is able!" There is something profoundly precious in these intimations which the Book gives of the Lord's "ability." "He is able to deliver us," said the noble Hebrew youths, above the roar of the furnace fire. "God is able to deliver me," said steadfast Daniel, at the mouth of the lions' den. "He is able to keep me," said

Paul, when he saw the gleam of the headsman's axe. "He is able to save to the uttermost," rings out like a joy-bell for all the world to hear. "He is able to succour," falls like music on all forlorn and sorrowful hearts. "He is able to subdue all things to Himself!" is the blast of a trumpet that heralds Immanuel's coronation day. He is able! This stem of the Living Vine upbearing, upholding every faithful soul. This truth is the key to the richest honour, the deepest peace, the most enduring strength of heart. He is able! and willing, too, though a world of sinners should fling their soul-weight on His atoning power and grace.

CLINGING.

"O holy Saviour! Friend unseen,
Since on Thine arm Thou bidst me lean,
Help me throughout life's varying scene
By faith to cling to Thee.

"Blest with this fellowship divine,
Take what Thou wilt, I'll ne'er repine;
E'en as the branches to the vine
My soul would cling to Thee.

"Far from her home, fatigued, oppressed,
Here she hath found her place of rest;
An exile still, but not unblessed,
For still I cling to Thee.

"Without a murmur I dismiss
My former dreams of earthly bliss;
My joy, my consolation this—
Each hour to cling to Thee.

"What though the world unfaithful prove
And earthly joys and friends remove?
With sure and certain hope of love
Still would I cling to Thee.

"Oft when I seem to tread alone
Some barren soil with thorns o'ergrown,
Thy voice of love in gentle tone,
Whispers, 'Still cling to Me.'

"Though faith and hope may oft be tried,
I ask not, need not aught beside;
How safe, how calm, how satisfied
The soul that clings to Thee!

"They fear not Satan nor the grave,
They feel Thee near and strong to save,
Nor dread to cross e'en Jordan's wave,
Because they cling to Thee.

"Blest is my lot whate'er befall;
What can disturb me, who appal,
While as my Strength, my Rock, my All,
Saviour, I cling to Thee!"

VI.

UNION.

Inasmuch as our blessed Lord is the Stem of the Vine, as represented in this beautiful parable, He is not only the mainstay of the branches, but He is also the centre of union, by which all the branches, in name and nature, in fruit, form, and foliage, are made one.

There may be a hundred branches in a vine; their place in reference to each other may be far apart; they may seem to have but a very distant connection with each other; but having each a living union with the central stem, they are all members of the same Vine, and every one of them therefore is a member one of the other. Some of the branches are barely above the ground; some peer higher than all the rest; some are weighted with fruit, much fruit rich and fine; some bear but little fruit and that only small and inferior; some occupy important and central positions; some are

seemingly insignificant, and look as though they might readily be dispensed with; as though, indeed, the tree would be healthier and more graceful without them; some are old and well grown, thoroughly strong and established; others are young, delicate, and need development. But whatever variety there may be among the branches in size, circumstance, or state, they all form a part of one complete, harmonious and like-natured whole. The vine-stem is the common centre, and in it all partake of a common life.

Is not this a beautiful and suggestive picture of the living relationship of believers to each other, through the relationship of all to Jesus Christ the Life? "Ye are all members of the body of Christ," says the apostle Paul, "and every one, therefore, members one of another." How sad is it that this delightful and most important truth should be so grievously and wickedly ignored! It is not too much to say that the practical contradiction given to it by the cold, ungenial, and ofttimes repellent and even antagonistic attitude of Christian to Christian, church to church, and creed to creed, has done far more than the direct enmity of the world to hinder the progress of the gospel of Jesus and to paralyse the efforts of the churches to reconquer the human

race for Christ. This "Noble Vine" which the Almighty hath planted in the earth will grow, its branches will spread and multiply, and its fruitfulness will increase in proportion as we remember and exhibit the winsome and convincing truth that "One is your Father, and all ye are brethren."

Our Lord, and His apostles also, being imbued with the same spirit, have clearly, conspicuously and impressively taught the Church this vital and heavenly lesson. Sometimes they represent the Church of Christ as a "body," at others as a house, a vine, a flock, a city, a kingdom; and the individual is a limb, a member, a branch, a sheep, a citizen, or a subject, as the case may be; and he is in every case and in all respects the like and fellow of his comrades and companions in the same holy and spiritual bond.

> God our Father, Christ our Brother,
> Brothers we of one another;
> Christ the Vine, the branches we,
> One for all the world to see;
> In the Christ we live and move,
> And the bond of life is love.

Whatever diversities may mark the individual or the Christian community he favours and with which he chooses to cast his lot, faith in Christ and the

consequent spiritual life makes him one in Christ with all believers, animated by the same "spirit," possessed of the same heavenly "hope," loyal to the same supreme "Master" and "Lord," subscribing in his heart to the same central and vital "faith," regenerated into the same new life and holy guild by the same "baptism," a child by adoption of the same "Father," and moving onward to the same home. In that home all will be incorporated into the same family, in the Father's house, and as then, so now, the common brotherhood should be real, acknowledged, practical. He is recreant to his God, a traitor to his Saviour, false to his brethren, and an enemy of his kind, who, for whatever cause, ignores, weakens, or endangers this sacred bond. The poet is right who declares—

"This truth more beautiful than all beside;
That He whose name is Love, and from whose heart,
As from a living and immortal root,
The whole fair universe hath budded forth,
Hath granted us the high and holy right
To call Him Father! Hath sent the Christ
To teach to all, to all, both small and great,
God's Fatherhood and the Brotherhood of man!"

"Even now a radiant angel goeth forth,
A spirit that hath healing in his wings;
And flieth east and west, and south and north,
To do the bidding of the King of kings;

Stirring men's hearts to compass better things ;
And teaching brotherhood as that sweet source
Which holdeth in itself all blessed springs ;
And showeth how to guide its gracious course
When it shall flood the world with deep exulting force.

"That radiant angel is the Gospel ruth,
Which Christ hath brought and sends through all the earth,
That all who will receive the living truth
May have new life, life—by a second birth
Into God's life and love, and all of worth
And weal that hearts can need for evermore ;
Filling the soul with good, and holy mirth,
And love to God and man unknown before.
Bright angel ! speed thy flight from shore to shore,
Bind all in bonds of love ! make all His love adore ! "

VII.

COMMUNITY.

"SEE how these Christians love one another!" If that admiring exclamation could be heard everywhere, wherever professing Christians are found, opposition to Christ and to Christian effort would lose all heart. The persuasions of the evangelists, backed by such a convincing and irresistible argument, would gain ever-accumulating force. The love of Christ exhibited in all its winsome loveliness in the Christian's behaviour towards his brother Christian, and in his tender and fraternal interest in him, would have a resistless weight, and the millennium of universal peace and brotherhood would be very near at hand. Of all the tests that men can put our religion to, there is none more satisfactory and convincing than this; none in which the verdict is more potent for good if it stands the test; none in which the verdict is more damning when it fails. If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen,

how shall he love God whom he hath not seen? On these lines all "them that are without" are sure to argue, and what answer, O unlovely, unloving, unbrotherly professor of a Christianity with no Christ in it, canst thou give?

"By this," said our Exemplar, "shall all men know that ye are My disciples if ye have love one to another." This is the "new commandment" which He gave to us in the days of His flesh; a commandment which seems to me to include the whole decalogue besides; and it is only by the new life which He puts into the soul that such a commandment can be kept. But where that new life, the life of His Spirit in the inner man, does exist; where His love is really shed abroad in the heart, it will be kept cheerfully, everywhere, and all the time: and where this love of the "brethren" is not present, aye, where it is not fully evident, there is proof positive, whatever the profession may be, that the inspiring love from heaven is not there. It is the unfailing test of love and loyalty to Christ, and no words can express the vital value of this true potential sign. It is the colour upon the cheek that betokens life; it is the diffused light that tells us, whatever of cloud may intervene, that the sun is in the heavens; it is the golden chain

that links man to man, and both to the throne of God.

The love which is the life of the heavenly Vine is and must be the same love which is the life of the branches too. "Love one another *even as I have loved you.*" That is the Saviour's way of putting it, and it may well cause the Christian to ponder and to pray. What a love was that! We cannot equal it in strength and in extent, but we can and must in kind and method, in expression and in deed. How freely it was given! At what a cost it was shown! How tender was it and compassionate! No mother for her babe did ever exhibit such tenderness of grace. Grace was on His lips, kindness was in His eye, gentleness was in His manner, love was in His heart, gifts were in His hands for anybody, everybody, all the time. It owned no limit, felt no weariness, knew no partiality, submitted to no restraint. It would not contract itself, or suspend its bestowments whatever treatment it received. This kind of love, a growing measure of this love is expected of every believer who sincerely and loyally names His name and would be fully obedient to His heavenly rule.

Out upon all sectarian animosities! On all bickerings and whisperings, all cutting words and

ungenerous constructions, all coolness, all sharp retorts! They are of the evil one. Every one of them is a spear-thrust at the loving heart of Jesus. Power, piety, prosperity, and all the precious things of grace shall dwell in that Church where love is Lord of all; and over its assemblies shall the Holy Dove brood always in gracious benediction, and send His healing and stimulating unction upon all its members, upon all its ministers, upon all its means of grace.

Let us remember also that fellow Christians are not to have a monopoly of our Christly love. In this respect the boughs, like Joseph's, are to run over the wall. The love of Christ is to be our pattern, and that too for the entire world of man. The love of Christ proclaimed by us and made manifest in us, is the one power which shall win the world from the bondage of sin and the power of Satan, and bring in the universal reign of Christ, the universal royalty and loyalty of love!

Lord, who hast taught to us on earth
This lesson from above,
That all our works are nothing worth
Unless they spring from love;—

Send down Thy Spirit from on high,
And pour in all our hearts

That precious gift of charity
Which peace and joy imparts :

The healing balm, the holy oil
Which calms the waves of strife,
The drop which sweetens every toil,
The breath of our new life.

Without this precious bond of love
God counts the living dead ;
To *love*, the soul must live and move
In Christ, the living Head.

O Living Vine ! Thy branches fill
With life-streams from above ;
Then shall be heard this witness still—
" See how these Christians love ! "

VIII.

NATURE.

THE nature of the root and stem of the vine, as of any other plant or tree, will always determine of what species or kind it is. The form of the plant, the shape of the leaf, the hue of the blossom, the kind and taste of the fruit it bears,—all are governed by the parent stock. You cannot raise an acorn from a beech-tree, nor can a plum be produced from the branches of a cherry-tree or a pear. So with the foliage: the leafage of the fir-tree can never clothe the branches of a poplar, nor the silver leaves of the aspen the boughs of the mountain ash. Like produces like, and each tree will bring forth both fruit and foliage "after its kind."

Now Jesus Christ Himself, as we have seen, is the Root and Stem of God's noble Vine. It is clear then that it is He who gives definite character and quality to the soul whose life is hid in Him.

Men cannot gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles, neither can they who are "accustomed to do evil," following their native bent, ever "learn to do well" in the Christly sense, or to bring forth the good fruit of the Christly life. This will determine whether we are "in Christ;" whether the vital change hath come to pass in us, which the Apostle Paul calls "newness of life," and which the Master Himself calls being "born again." "He who is born of God," says the Apostle John, "does not commit sin." That is not the nature of the life he has received; that is not the quality of the tree on which he grows; he will not bring forth evil fruit because he is growing on a good tree, and the productions of the old life are "things whereof" he is "now ashamed."

In the Root and Stem of the living Vine, are all the eternal forces of goodness, of truth, of righteousness, of love. Every living branch that feels the quickening Spirit, the divine life-sap circulating through his moral being, will grow goodness, truth, righteousness and love and all other fruits of the Spirit, as surely as the apple-tree produces apples or grapes grow on the vine. Vine leaf, vine blossom, vine smell, vine fruit, are all unquestioned certainties from the vine root and

stem; and it is equally certain that Christ walk, Christ talk, Christ character, Christ influence, and Christ deeds are all the sure and natural outcome of any real engrafting of the soul into Christ the Living Vine. Hereby may we, hereby ought we to examine ourselves, and see whether we be in the faith or no.

It is said of that noble and self-sacrificing missionary, Hiram Judson, that on one occasion his wife read to him certain magazine and newspaper notices of himself and his mission travels. She thought to amuse and interest him thereby. But in them all he was compared admiringly and approvingly with some one or other of the apostles of our Lord. He was grieved exceedingly. "I do not want," said he, "to be like Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, but I want to have in me always the spirit of Christ, and show forth Christ, and to be like Him. We have only one perfect Exemplar; only One whom it is safe or good to follow. I want to copy Him in all His teachings, to drink into His spirit, to place myself in His footsteps, and measure my shortcomings by that standard alone." Here speaks the Christly soul, whose "new life" will exert itself in active effort to produce the life and character which inspires him. This it is,

O Christian—Christ man! to be a living branch of the living Vine!

The vine, the vine leaf drapes,
The vine grows only grapes,
As is the vine so is the fruit;
Its branches are the same
In nature as the stem,
And are identic with the root.

As is the living Vine,
The source of life divine,
So also shall the Christian be;
And on the self-same plan,
As Christ the pattern Man,
His soul shall move eternally.

The olden life of sin,
Now he is "grafted in"
And in his Lord doth live and grow,
Hath now nor life nor place,
For by His sovereign grace
New life thro' every vein doth flow.

His thought, His mind, His love
Through all his being move,
And He and they have one design,—
To seek in deed and word
The glory of the Lord,
Alike the glory of the branch and Vine.

IX.

THE TRUE VINE.

In this beautiful and richly suggestive parable, Jesus Christ describes Himself as the *true* Vine, the only stock which can produce real, healthy, salutary life and blessing, the only possible source and root from whence good fruit can possibly proceed. There are "strange vines" which bring forth "wild grapes" in perilous abundance, planted in the soil of our human nature by "an enemy," who hath done this with malign intent and evil purpose against God and man; but their nature is deadly, their grapes, however luscious and inviting, are noxious; their very shadow and foliage, like the fabled Upas tree, are redolent of destruction and death. Against these the Book is full of warning, and their malific properties are fully and emphatically described.

There are grapes of gold, for which the grower sells his soul, and Mammon is the spirit that drives

the ruinous bargain. There are the grapes which being pressed into the goblet do sparkle and coruscate, and Pleasure's fascinating beauties are reflected in the flowing cup; but a serpent lies coiled below the ruby draught and stingeth like an adder the victim she allures. There are grapes of which the smooth-tongued vine-dresser says that "they are much to be desired to make one wise." "Eat," quoth he, "and ye shall be as gods. Taste, and ye shall know good and evil." Hungry for forbidden knowledge, thirsty for such discoveries as shall enable them to deify human reason, contemn all revelation and dictate to the Deity, they eat the cunning globules, drink the intoxicating charm, and then babble of man without a Maker, mankind without a law, and a universe without a God!

Yes. There are vines, vineyards, vine-dressers, and wine-fats in this deluded and deluding world. Pleasant is their shadow, graceful and winsome their festoonings, attractive are their supplies either from the cluster or the flagon, and, alas! those who are deluded by them "know not that the dead are there," and that the shaded and enticing paths that lead men thither are "steps that take hold on hell." "Their vine is of the vine of Sodom and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall,

their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps." Such is the divine declaration concerning all that puts itself in competition with Jehovah, the Rock, the Vine, the Only Good. It was a "wild vine" which produced the fruit gathered in mistake by the servant of Elisha, so that there came to be "death in the pot" into which the deceptive grapes were shed; and so with all the false trusts and hopes of humanity; they shall all fail utterly in the hour of supremest need, and become either "an empty vine" which mocks the thirsty soul, or the grapes shall be as those which were predicted for Palestina:—"Out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be as a fiery serpent."

Have a care, O reader, of all false vines! The only TRUE Vine is Jesus Christ. He is the "faithful and true," for "He is the true God and eternal life." "In Him all fulness dwells:" all fulness of power, all fulness of knowledge, all fulness of love; and all this infinite and perfect trinity of fulness is the inalienable heritage of every soul on earth whose hope and trust, whose love and whose desire is fixed alone on Him.

"I am the true Vine!"—that is what He said just before the agony smote Him to the ground;

just before His human heart-break on the Cross; "I am the true Vine!" And then in the "wine-press" He suffered for our sins, and His blood became the true wine; the wine of life! "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink!"

Jesus, the gift divine I know,
The gift divine I ask of Thee;
Thy living streams on me bestow,
Thy Spirit and Thyself on me:
Thou, Lord, of life the Fountain art,
Now let me find Thee in my heart!

Thee let me drink, and thirst no more
For drops of finite happiness;
Spring up, O Well, in heavenly power,
In streams of pure perennial peace,
In joy that none can take away,
In life which shall for ever stay.

"And they saw no man save Jesus only." That is what is said of the three disciples after the vision on the Mount had passed away. It supplies us with a motto for life—"Jesus only!" He is the only Way, the only Truth, the only Life. He is the One Hope of the world, the One Teacher sent from God, the One Power to redeem, to transform, to save. He is the fruit of all the dispensations, the culmination of all the rich providences of God, the fulfilment of all the prophecies, the crown of all

the ages, the Life of all humanity, the hope of all the world, the Saviour! Look unto HIM and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth!

O Saviour true! but Thou my life can'st be,
In heaven above I have no hope but Thee;
In earth I want not, need not aught beside,
Thou only art the true, the true and tried.

Thou art the one, true, only living Vine;
To meaner trusts although my heart incline,
Be gracious, Lord, and knit me to Thy side,
There only, only there, can I be satisfied.

THE BRANCHES.

Like some fair branch
On some still fairer tree,
Would I, O Lord,
By grace be knit to Thee ;
That from Thy life
My soul may draw supplies ;
That in my life,
My friends' observant eyes
May still admire
The nature new
That doth my life inspire.

THE BRANCHES.

I.

THE BOND.

After declaring Himself to be the Vine, our blessed Lord proceeds to speak of His disciples as the branches of that goodly tree. "Ye are the branches," He said to the chosen few who sat with Him at the last supper, who went with Him through the vineyards, and who after their sad lapse during the sorely testing time of Calvary, became subjects and servants of their Lord, grafted into Him by the Pentecostal power, and were faithful unto death. They were representative men, and in speaking to them our Lord spake through them to all, right down the centuries, who should believe on His name. To every true believer Jesus says to-day, "thou art a branch of the True Vine." We

may well ask, what meaneth this? and ask also for grace and wisdom to understand and apply the answer.

It means, first of all, that the relationship which the Christian bears to his Lord and Saviour is real, natural, vital, and nothing less or other. It is, of course, possible to attach a bough or branch either to the stem of a vine or the trunk of any other tree by artificial means, and so to secure a kind of external union therewith. A length of rope or cord or iron wire may accomplish a poor and pitiful result like that; but the stem knows it not and the branch is withered, however painfully and skilfully art may struggle to endorse the lie.

In the same way we may be mechanically and externally united to the Church, the visible Church of Christ. That is entirely an affair of contrivance, a mere matter of ligature or glue. It is altogether and at most a concern of nomination, register or ceremonial. But let it be remembered that this is in itself stark naught. Never a rotten branch on the floor of a forest, a branch that breaks and crackles beneath the foot of a passer-by, is more dead than we are, if the hasp and staple of church membership, if the hook and eye of registration, if the glue of mere sectarian adhesion, if the paint of

mere external profession are all that holds us to the Christ of God.

"A name to live," an affirmation made in the hearing of men, or a sign hung in face or garment, tone or attitude that we *do* live, puts no life into us, and deceives none but self-deceivers, who are given over to believe a lie. Those whose bond of union with the living Vine consists only of the adoption of a creed, the profession of a faith, adherence to a system, are faggots and not branches, not vitalised for fruit and beauty, only fuel for fire.

The branch and the tree are one. Theirs is a common nature and a common life. The connection between the two is not a mere junction; it is not only contact but confluence. Saving faith brings the soul to Christ, hangs the soul on Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit engrafts the soul into Christ, breathes into the soul the life and love and mind of Christ; and so the sinner, pardoned, renewed, inspired, becomes one with Christ. He is described in the Word of God as a "new creature in Christ Jesus;" and Jesus Christ is described also as being in him; the life is one, the life alike of branch and Vine.

Let us notice how the Saviour Himself expresses this vital bond, this living influence, this blended

force. "He abideth in Me and I in Him." What can this mean, but that His one heart-beat gives a life-pulse to every limb; His will gives volition to every member; His one living root-force sends a life-throb through every branch? "Because I live, ye live also," saith the Saviour; and Paul affirms that though he has been crucified with Christ, yet, says he, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Is this our experience? Here we may well pause and ask the question, Am I in Christ? Is Christ in me? Or are these merely meaningless formulas that we may explain as we please, and, if we please, explain away? But if so, what meaneth this?—"If a man abide not *in Me*, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered?"

Jesus, ever-living Vine,
All Thy life and love are mine;
Thou art mine and I am Thine,
To be parted—never!
Knit me, Saviour, to Thy side,
Grafted in, I shall abide;
Growing there, whate'er betide;
Nought the tie can sever.

All my life, Lord, is in Thee,
All my life Thine own shall be;
Lord of life, inspire Thou me,
Help my weak endeavour.
Thou the Vine, and I the bough,
Living, loving, I and Thou
One in spirit are, and now
Shall be one for ever.

II.

GROWTH.

In the vine there is branch-life from the beginning, but there is not maturity. That is the process of time and development. Ultimately, the "tender branch" becomes a sturdy bough, becomes, in turn, the cause of other branches and the bearer of increasing clusters of fruit. The believer engrafted into Christ must grow. The new life that is in him insists upon it, constrains him to it, will not continue in him apart from it. Not to grow is to die. I have heard it said that when tree or plant or shrub arrives at that stage of its history and experience that growth is no longer possible, that there is no further development, no puttings forth beyond;—then that moment of poise and pause is the commencement of decline, and its tendency from that hour, it may be slowly, but is nevertheless surely towards ultimate decay.

Growth is just as essential to Christian life. The

point of pause is the beginning of decay. "Follow on to know the Lord," is an injunction always in force, and must always be obeyed, not at the risk of merely standing still, but of sliding back into selfishness, insensibility and sin. "Follow on to know the Lord!" Then shall we know more fully, perfectly, joyously; "His going is prepared as the morning, and He shall come to us as the former and the latter rain." There is the promise of early dew, and the bright shining of the sun, and the rich refreshments of the rain upon our branch-life, making us healthy, vigorous, fresh and fruitful, but all on the condition that we "follow on," growing "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This growing, let us remember, is to be the growth of a branch: not by accretion, by adding to the surface, but by strength and development from within. You may make a molehill into a mountain by bringing a sufficiency of material to it, to swell the rising pile; but trees and branches expand from within: their growth is the putting forth of a vital but unseen force. The life-power in the stock, being also in the bough, compels an outward exhibition of results in progressive keeping with the vigour and strength of the supplies. So the believer

"grows up" into Christ into ever-increasing holiness, influence and grace through the divine afflatus which is at work within his soul, for it is thus that "God worketh in you" more and more "to will and to do of His good pleasure."

By this inner power the branches of a tree have a wonderful power of assimilation. They take hold upon all surrounding forces and turn them to advantage. The dew that falls, the gases of the atmosphere, the descending rain, the chemistry of the sunlight, all are drawn into it; all are made a part of itself, are made to serve its purpose and to nurse its health. The very storms that blow, the alternations of weather that test and try it and oft-times seem to work it damage, are all made to consolidate its fibres, to quicken the action of its sap, and send new energy through every vein, a stronger life-thrill into every leaf.

So grows the righteous soul into higher, stronger, more mature religious life. "All things are yours," says the apostle Paul. That is to say, all events, all experiences, all the providences of God, all the circumstances of life, as well as all the riches of promised grace, are made by the goodness and wisdom of God to serve the Christian's interests and help his soul to grow. The dew of the Spirit, the

sunshine of God, the aids of the sanctuary, the society of the good, the exercise of Christian toil, the business of life, the storms and tempests of sorrow and trial,—all things, by reason of the subtle power of the inner life, are made to help the Christian, to deepen his piety, to strengthen his soul, to beautify his character, to mature and ripen his graces, and to give him a stronger grip upon his God. "All things work together for good to them that love God."

Neither is there any limit to the attainments possible to the godly soul. Under the influence of the divine life it is placed amid an exhaustless store of nourishment, it is grafted into the Vine whose Root is the Godhead and whose resources are infinite and eternal.

"Neither death nor resurrection
Is the spirit's final goal;
Transformations are but stations
In the progress of the soul.

"Who shall dare to set a period
To its ultimate ascent,
As from strength to strength it goeth
To endless, new astonishment;

"Tending ever to its Maker,
Through the grades of seraphim,
Never lessening the distance
Still between itself and Him?"

It is greatly to be feared that the solemn duty and the transcendent privilege of religious growth does not take hold upon Christian people as it ought to do: but it is of vital importance, and its neglect is rife with danger, and may be with moral death. The talent in the napkin may be kept intact, but when the Master cometh and findeth no growth, no increase, no advance, what will the "wicked and slothful" servant say?

From inner life, from secret root,
Come bud, and leaf, and growth, and fruit;
And as the vine increaseth more,
The branch grows stronger than before.

Just so the Christian's secret spring
From inmost core doth outward bring
All grace and good more evident,
The Christian's true development.

O Vine! O Life! Thy power assert,
And every hour in me exert
Thy quickening forces! Make them flow
Through all my life, that I may grow,—

May grow in wisdom, strength alway,
May grow more like Thee day by day;
More favour with my God may find,
More full of service to mankind.

By this increase of secret strength,
And meet for heaven made at length,

Then in Thy presence shall I dwell,
My Life, my King Immanuel!

Through all the bright eternity
Still shall I, Saviour, follow Thee,
Whithersoever Thou dost go,
And more and more Thyself shall know.

Still leaving things that are behind,
Still richer joys my soul shall find,
Still greater powers to serve, and be
For ever, liker, Lord, to Thee.

III.

LIFE-CURRENT.

"I AM the Vine; ye are the branches." There is, therefore, not only a common life, but a common circulation of the current which carries life, the vital sap, the "blood which is the life." In the vine, as in every living plant and tree, there is a medium by which the whole living fabric is kept in communication with, and nourished by the root. These juices, sap as they are commonly called, are ever present, ever active, ever essential to the existence of the tree.

When a small scion is grafted into a different stock, a stream of life begins at once to flow from the tree into the branch which has been grafted in. Herein, we have a clear illustration of the new current of spiritual energy which flows from the Divine Root through the souls of those who by faith receive life in Jesus Christ. The sap of the ordinary vine, charged with all the elements of life, vigour, beauty, fruit, rises from the root, passes

through the stem, courses through every vein, and moving with strong untiring energy, keeps the entire plant green and hale and hearty. Just such a potent influence, just such a subtle, active agency, just such an elixir of life flows through the "new man in Christ Jesus," and makes him more and more Christly in word and thought and deed.

"If ye abide in Me, *and My words abide in you.*" These are the Saviour's own words. "My words." The truth as it is in Jesus, believed, received, applied by the Spirit of Truth, truth in the inward parts, this is the holy and assimilating influence which "speaks life" into the Christian; this is the nourishing and stimulating aliment on which the branch subsists. Surely it is for this reason that it is called a "living word." No wonder we are commanded to search the Scriptures; no wonder that it is called the "word of life," no wonder that "he that hath ears to hear" is so often urged to "hear," that he may not droop, may not wither, may not grow flaccid and sickly for want of the ever-growing, ever-flowing knowledge of the truth which makes him "wise unto salvation" and "strengthens him with strength in his soul."

In the first psalm, the truly righteous man is represented as pre-eminently a student of the Word

of God, and a pensioner on its unfailing bounties. "In His law doth He meditate day and night." And immediately afterwards, as if to denote the vital forces he receives thereby, it is said that he is "like a tree planted by rivers of water," and grows flourishingly and fruitfully, because he draws strength and sustainment from living springs, which will cause him to "prosper" more and more. So the Apostle Paul, addressing the Christians of Colosse, says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." James bids the Church to "receive with meekness the ingrafted (or implanted) word, which is able to save your souls." Peter described its nourishing and energising qualities in the expression, "the sincere milk of the Word," and declares that the receivers shall "grow thereby." Our Saviour declares emphatically that man cannot "live by bread alone," but by the "word of God!" John declares that the "young men" are "strong" because "the word of God abideth in" them, St. Paul speaks of Timothy as "a good minister nourished in the word of faith." The whole of Psalm cxix. has the "word of God" as a living force for its theme and burden, and the Psalmist speaks of it as "quickening," "strengthening," "stablishing," and in every way upholding,

supporting, and inspiring the faithful soul; and to sum up the whole inspired testimony on this subject in one sentence, Jesus Christ Himself declares, "The words that I have spoken to you, they are spirit, and they are life!"

Let us hear the testimony of the learned and pious Dr. Wayland, when he was laid aside from active duty by feeble health. "I have read the Bible more than ever in my life in the same space of time; and at every new reading I find more and more to love and to feed upon. I read and read with increasing interest and blessing, and lay hold with greater and more constant strength upon eternal life." O Christian! wouldst thou grow in grace, in spirituality, in truth? Read the Book; study the Word! More and more shall it abide in you and with ever-increasing power and profit.

> "Read then; but first thyself prepare
> To read with zeal, to mark with care;
> And when thou read'st what here is writ,
> Let thy best practice second it;
> So, twice each precept read shall be,
> First in the Book, and next in thee.
> In thee shall dwell the living word,
> And mould thee, shape thee, like thy Lord."

The power given to us through the Word and by the Spirit, invisible, invincible, the living Vine gives

always without measure to every living branch united to Him by saving faith. Here again let us examine ourselves and see whether we are in the faith or no. Are our souls kept alive and vigorous by reason of our daily diet supplied from the banquet table of the Book? Are our souls quickened, stimulated, cheered and strengthened by perpetual inflowings from these living springs? By this means, not only His life, but His joy shall remain in us, and our joy shall be full!

His branches still
Our Vine shall fill
With holy inspiration;
His quickening love
Our souls shall move
With holy animation.

His life divine,
His truth, like wine,
Our hearts and lives shall nourish;
His gracious powers
Shall nurture ours,
And make our souls to flourish.

The word of faith,
The Saviour saith,
He will be always giving;
His word within
Makes free from sin,
And is the joy of living.

O living Lord!
Thy living word
Into my soul still flowing,
Shall strengthen me
Thy branch to be,
Hale, fruitful, graceful, growing.

O living Vine!
O Saviour mine!
With faith and love still bless me,
That I in Thee,
For aye may be,
And all Thy life possess me.

IV.

CHARACTER.

HAVING in them the life and mind of Christ, and being continually inspired by the Spirit of Christ, the disciples of Christ must definitely and naturally exhibit the character of Christ; the branches must make manifest the constitution and the virtue of the Vine. We have already seen that, as the Root and Stem, Christ gives character to the branch, leaf, flower and fruit. Now we see the natural result. To the branch is committed the duty and privilege of making the invisible force evident to the eye of all observers.

The office and mission of the branches of any vine, are to hold up to view, as it were, the secret potencies that are at work silently and constantly beneath the soil and within the bark. He who passes through a forest is enabled to determine by a single glance at the shape of the trees and the peculiarities of their foliage that one is an oak,

another an elm, a third a beech, and a fourth a sycamore. In an orchard, especially in the summer time or in the early autumn, we know at once the apple-tree, the plum-tree or the pear. Neither can anybody fail in passing through a vineyard to distinguish vines from fig-trees, or from anything else that grows within its borders. There are always outward signs and tokens presented by the branches which place the matter of kind and species beyond dispute.

"I am the Vine, ye are the branches." It is as if our Lord had said, "Your mission it is to hang out the signs, to lift up the tokens, to spread wide the evidence as to what *kind* of force it is which flows through, and controls your soul-life. The divine nature of the stock on which you grow *you* are to make as evident in your life and conduct as the broad indented leaf and purple clusters definitely and certainly bespeak the vine. You are so to live that every observer noting your walk and conversation, and your general behaviour, shall be able to say with certainty, "That is a Christian," a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the days of His life on earth, the Living Vine displayed the winsome form, spread the graceful foliage, exhaled the pleasant fragrance, produced

the precious fruit in His own human life and character. His conduct and behaviour were such that even His enemies and detractors were constrained to testify that He was "come from God," and that the divine life was in Him from day to day.

But now, the Vine Himself is invisible; He hath passed into the heavens; but His disciples are His branches; they are His true and appointed representatives; they are His loyal and loving servants; they are His perceptible developments. Their holy mission, their sacred task, their delightful duty, their blessed privilege it is to be in all things "as He was in this world." "Ye are our epistles," says the Apostle, and both he and they to whom he wrote were the epistles, evidences of Jesus, to be known and read of all men. Though the living Head is out of sight, high up in the heavens of glory, His body is here; His members are still before the eyes of men, and their every movement, their every act and deed are to bespeak the divine and holy will that inspires their volitions, directs their movements, inspires their actions and controls their ways.

When the great missionary, Dr. Judson, was labouring for his Master among the poor benighted

Karens, he used to be called by the simple natives, as he passed to and fro among their rude villages, "Jesus Christ's man." Surely that was the highest honour they could have put upon him; and that is what men should definitely and certainly be able to say of every believer whose life is hid with Christ in God. If the root be a vine root, the boughs are vine branches, and everybody knows them for what they are.

"They love their Blessed Leader. Not more close
The branches cling unto the parent tree,
Than are His followers bound to Christ. They loose,
Like Him, their hold on earthly things. They free
Their hearts from the strong bond of selfishness,
And yield for general good their private weal.
'Tis thus their Saviour taught them. They are one
With Him, and in their lives His image bear,
Rejoicing in His likeness. As the sun
Doth spread his radiance through the fields of air,
And kindle in revolving stars his blaze,
He pours out *through their lives* the splendour of His rays."

O ye Christians! be very jealous for the Lord; and being jealous for His glory, be very zealous in the upholding of His honour. The world holds Him in dishonour, and gives His glory to another: true religion is disparaged, His character assailed, and His name discredited, even in the house of His

friends. The Saviour was His own answer to His traducers while He lived on earth. "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" was His triumphant challenge, to which none could make reply. Christ is now ascended, and He hath given His holy name, His spotless fame, His beautiful character, His high pretensions into the keeping of His Church and people. The Christian believers have to represent Him. They bear His name, they wear His robes, they reflect His image; and their high and holy duty it is to bear the name without dishonour, to wear the robe without a stain, to reflect His likeness without either dimness or distortion. Remember the prayer of Jesus to the Father, "The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given them, *that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me.*"

Even as the full ears in the gathered sheaves
Tell us 'twas corn the sower went to sow;
As the ripe clusters and the broad green leaves
Make evident the vine-stock where they grow:

So doth the Christian by his fair behaviour,
By righteous deeds, and hands unsoiled by sin,
Lovely, of good report, reveal the Saviour,
His character without, *His* life within.

Lord, with sad hearts and painful tears, we bow
Low at Thy feet, our faithlessness to own,

Forgive ! new life inbreathe ! with grace endow,
That we may live and show forth Thee alone !

Then, seeing us, all men shall glorify
Our Father, and the Christ we serve admire ;
Then, taking knowledge of our standard high,
His righteousness shall they themselves desire.

When the True Vine is in His branches seen,
When they His power and holiness display,
Then shall His kingdom spread, His gospel win
In human hearts its ever-widening way.

V.

SILENT SIGNALS.

Let us learn also while we look at the vine branch as a representation of the Christian life that the manifestation of the excellency of the Christ root is silently, naturally, spontaneously done. The vine does not flaunt its verdant beauties or parade its purple fruits. In the former case each leaf seems to lose itself in the general mass, and in the latter the clusters half-conceal themselves behind the leaves. There is no self-assertion, and the eye is compelled to witness and admire. There is not so much an exhibition as a revelation. The vine grows, buds, blossoms, unfolds its green garments of beauty, and hangs its graceful bunches just as the rose unfurls its petals and flings its fragrance to the air: it is natural and cannot be otherwise. It simply follows out quietly to the full issue the natural promptings that lie within and underneath.

Thus, too, the Christian, the branch of the Living

Vine, unconsciously, unassumingly, with the true humility of unselfishness, lives godly, acts piously, and is morally fair and beautiful, not to be seen of men, not to seek the praise of men, but simply because Jesus is the root-force and heart-throb of his life. His mission is to shine out the goodness of his Saviour into the eyes of men, and though he may seldom say it, he always feels, "not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thee be glory." Like Moses when he came down from the Mount, his face shines, but he knows not that he shines, although the glow is on him all the time.

Old Thomas Secker says, "He is the most lovely professor who is the most lowly one. As incense smells the sweetest when it is beaten the smallest, so saints look the fairest when they lie the lowest." And we may add, too, that the more the branch is laden with good fruit, the more it bends towards the ground. President Edwards well describes the true Christian as "such a little flower as we see in the spring of the year, low and humble in the ground; opening its bosom to receive the pleasant beams of the sun's glory; rejoicing as it were in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragrance, standing peacefully and lowly in the midst of other flowers."

Give me the lowest place ; not that I dare
Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died
That I might live and share
Thy glory by Thy side.

Give me the lowest place ; or if for me
The lowest place too high, make one more low,
Where I may sit and see
My Lord, and love Thee so.

We are to covet the best gifts ; and this is one of the best of all ; that "low sweet root from which all other virtues shoot." To be nothing, that Christ may be all ; to show His power, His praise, His beauty, His surpassing loveliness undimmed, undisparaged by any streak of self. This is how the angels serve. This is the perfect glory of the saints in heaven. This should be the ardent aspiration of every Christian on earth.

The saint that wears heaven's brightest crown
In deepest adoration bends ;
The weight of glory bends him down,
Then most, when most his soul ascends.
Nearest the throne itself we see
The footstool of humility.

"The honest and good heart," writes Bishop Sumner, "is the only soil in which the Christian graces can expand and flourish. It is humble, because it feels how far its goodness is from extend-

ing unto God, and how much there is that belongs to the 'unprofitable servant' even in its best services. It glories not in its attainments, or in its spiritual progress, because it is written that it is 'God that maketh men to differ;' and that He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

Oh, learn that it is only by the lowly
The paths of peace are trod;
If thou wouldst keep thy garments white and holy,
Walk humbly with thy God.

The man with earthly wisdom high uplifted,
Is in God's sight a fool;
But he in heavenly truth most deeply gifted,
Sits lowest in Christ's school.

The lowly spirit God hath consecrated
As His abiding rest;
An angel by some patriarch's tent hath waited,
When kings had no such guest.

The dew that never wets the flinty mountain
Falls in the valley free;
Bright verdure fringes the small desert fountain
But barren sand the sea.

Not in the stately oak the fragrance dwelleth
Which charms the general wood;
But in the violet low whose sweetness telleth
Its unseen neighbourhood.

The censer swung by the proud hand of merit,
Fumes with a fire abhorred;
But faith's two mites, dropped covertly, inherit
A blessing from the Lord.

VI.

FOLIAGE.

While the essential necessity of being fruit-bearers needs persistently to be urged upon all who are followers of Jesus, it must not be forgotten that leaf-bearing is also a natural and fitting outcome of all true union with the living Vine. There are few warnings given to Christian people, from the pulpit and otherwhere, oftener or more solemnly, than of the danger and folly of producing "nothing but leaves." That quotation from the Book hath passed into a proverb. It *is* a great peril, and the warning is needed. But we must not therefore think nothing of leaves, or undervalue the important part that foliage has to play alike in the vine branch and the Christian believer.

The foliage of any tree, and especially of the vine, takes credit, and rightly so, for a large share of the beauty and attractiveness of the tree. Its graceful appearance and general winsomeness are

almost due to this alone. The grape-clusters themselves are all the more pleasant to the eye, and more attractive to the gatherer, because they are draped and garlanded in living green.

There are some Christians who are much inclined to boast themselves because they are not in the habit of "making a profession" of religion. Some of them will tone it down a little, and deprecate the making "much" profession. I have no doubt that this is often a very clever and a very mischievous delusion of the devil. It is quite possible that the absence of the external in religion may be a token of the limp, flaccid and all but lifeless condition of the branch. It is incumbent on every Christian to let his light *so* shine that men may be *attracted* to the Saviour whose reflection it is, and of whose beauty and grace it is the sure token and sign.

A true Christian should aim at having Christly manners as well as a Christly mind. His very deportment and behaviour, while at the utmost possible remove from the sanctimoniousness and Pharisaic seeming which so often brings religion into contempt, should have that about it as a whole which commands respect for the light-holder

as well as for the Light he desires to honour. "His leaf shall be green!" a pleasant fragrance shall subtly tell the presence of the Christ, and at the same time his fruit shall show more mellow and well-pleasing because of the refreshing and attractive setting of behaviour amid which the clusters hang.

Making a profession, as it is called, is no doubt ever to be deprecated, if it is really only a human process of manufacture, intended for ornament and not for use; but the profession which is a loyal confession, and the social bearing which is the outcome of the kindly charities, and the cheery sympathies and feelings of the heart, this is beautiful and every way to be desired.

A Christian with nothing about him to tell or denote that he is a close follower and imitator of the meek, kindly, courteous, gentle and beautiful-minded Jesus, who was the fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, however he may produce real fruit of worth and service,—is as improper, as unnatural, and as unsightly as a summer vine which is naked of foliage, or ragged and flimsy, with only here and there a leaf on its bald and uninviting boughs.

"Let us with a gladsome mind
Praise the Lord, for He is kind"—

says a sweet singer rightly and truly enough; but the warm glow in the heart that prompts the song should surely bring a bright gleam upon the face, a sort of natural and consequent shimmer of light, like that which plays among the sun-kissed vine-leaves while the breeze is stirring. There is a possibility of making even the truth of God repellent; of doing Christian duty and bearing the Christian profession in so unlovely a fashion, as to act like the negative end of a magnet on those who come within its influence. It is possible to make even tender-eyed charity to wear a frown, and to rob kindness and sympathy of its heavenly bloom by ways and manners foreign to its nature.

Let us seek to wear the bright credentials of those who are at peace with God, with themselves, and their fellowmen. Let us forbear to libel our religion and our Master by moroseness, sternness, sullenness, or gloom; but let us cultivate and wear the sunny countenance, the cheerful spirit, the pleasant aspect, the kindly tone; and in all and through all and upon all let the light of piety rest like the evident smile and benediction of our God. Bear much fruit, O Christian! but do not forget the leaves!

Bright the stars in heaven are shining,
Bright the sky with summer blue,
Bright the clouds in sun's declining,
Bright the crystal drops of dew.

Springtide brightly tells its story,
Summer shines with brightest flowers,
Autumn dons a golden glory,
Bright the frost makes wintry hours.

Nature all her gifts enhances
By the garlands which she weaves;
And her fruit in worth advances
By its coronal of leaves.

So the soul's glad new creation
Out of sin to glorious life,
Greater brightness should occasion
With all joy and gladness rife.

For we are Christ's and not another's,
And He, the Living Vine, I ween.
Let every living branch, my brothers,
Still be dressed in living green.

The faithful followers of the Saviour,
Branches of the Living Vine,
Show by beauty of behaviour,
Fruit, life, foliage—all Divine.

VII.

EXPANSION.

The branches of the vine begin almost with their youngest life to be the centres of new departures. Ever themselves extending and expanding, they nevertheless are the means and medium by which fresh branches are added to draw life from the parent stem. Spurring out in this direction and dividing again in that, they become an instrumentality by which the whole number of boughs is materially increased. Thus the growth of the branch and its multiplying power proceed together, are largely dependent on each other, and suggest a lesson of profound importance to the Christian with regard to another vital feature of his life in Christ.

As branches of the living Vine we are to be the instruments and agencies by which still other branches may be grafted into Christ. By a constant spiritual propagation we are ever to increase and

multiply, to extend and advance the wealth and honours of the parent Vine. The acreage over which God's vineyard spreads is to be ever increasing more and more. By the means of the life-force in existing boughs, it is to expand until its beautiful, bountiful, and beneficent shade over-canopies the world, and makes the recovered earth again as the garden of the Lord.

In this way, Andrew findeth his own brother Simon and brings him straightway to see and worship. Philip finds and brings Nathanael: the mother brings the child of many prayers; the comrade brings his friend; the teacher brings his scholar; the minister brings his hearer, and all the while, the Spirit carries on the grafting process and souls are added to the Lord, living branches such as shall be saved. Thus the vine increases; the branches run over the wall, hang their fruit in the sun and exhale their fragrance to the winds of heaven. To-day the living Vine is thus throwing its encroaching boughs all round the world, and what were formerly waste places, barren and useless to the Husbandman, are now echoing with the merry shouts of those who are treading out the grapes.

How far and wide has the ever-encroaching Vine spread since the day when Jesus said, "I am the

Vine, ye are the branches!" To-day what spreading boughs and ripening clusters gain life and blessing from the Central Stem! From how many teeming presses the purple wine is streaming into the wine-fats of the Husbandman! O widespread branches of the living Vine! over every part of this sea-girt isle have they hooked their tendrils and spread their foliage to the sun. Over plain and prairie, wooded slope and fertile valley of the western hemisphere, have they made their way. Among the mosques and minarets of the hoary East they have crept and clung with a tenacity which augurs ill for the wild vines they must displace. We see the sacred branches suspended still, strong and enduring, among Alpine cliffs and Vaudois rocks and hills. These branches are running over the great Chinese Wall and are being trellised round the homes of the advancing Japanese. They flourish on "India's coral strand" and beneath Ethiopia's sultry sky, and fringe with novel beauty the charming islands of the southern sea. Yet however wide they spread, however high they grow, however numerous they become, however different the climes in which they flourish, they are all united in one parent Stem below. The Vine never ceases to grow and prosper till it covers a land with the rich foliage of religious ordinances, fills its happy homes with

the fruits of Christian charity, and the presses of the chief Husbandman with the rich and grateful vintage of loyalty and love, of service and of praise! Let us ourselves get fairly hold of the great fact that personal growth in grace and the development of multiplying energy go on together. If we would bring men to a knowledge of the truth, we ourselves must increase in spiritual power. If we would make real progress in spiritual life, we must strive to bring others to the feet of Jesus. In this respect we are our brother's keeper. On two commandments hang all the law and the prophets and all the gospel too. The first refers to our own soul-health. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength." The second has to do with our relationship to others, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Both these laws must be kept. They cannot be separated; and in keeping them we shall find how much they interact and how wondrously helpful the one is to the other. Whatsoever branch of the Vine ignores or neglects this, shall be flaccid, drooping, unhealthy, and wither in the greenness of its spring.

How do we and duty stand as to this matter? Are we branches of the Vine? Then, are other branches being knit to the common stock by our

means? Are there any buds breaking, O ye teachers of the young? Any little twigs apparent, O ye parents, growing on the Stem Divine? May every little patch our influence covers be trellised thick with living branches, bright with beauty, and hanging heavy with the clustered grapes of God!

"Listen! The Master beseecheth,
Calling each one by his name;
His voice to each loving heart reacheth
Its cheerfulest service to claim.

"Go, where the vineyard demandeth
Vine-dresser's nurture and care;
Or go, where the white harvest standeth,
The joy of the reaper to share.

"Seek those of evil behaviour,
Bid them their lives to amend;
Go, point the lost world to the Saviour,
And be to the friendless a friend.

"Work, though the enemies' laughter
Over the valleys may sweep—
For God's patient workers, hereafter,
Shall laugh when their enemies weep.

"Offer thy life on the altar;
In the high purpose be strong;
And if the tired spirit should falter,
Then sweeten thy labour with song."

VIII.

CONDITION.

Even at the risk of what may appear at first sight to be only a needless repetition, I must call attention to another truth which is plainly taught, and which is reiterated and emphasised by Jesus in this most pregnant and suggestive parable. The continuous life and prosperity of the branches are absolutely dependent on their abiding union with the central stem. On this point the Saviour's words are strong and weighty with solemn warning: "If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered."

The vine branch is not a tree. It has no independent life. Its only lease of existence is its connection with the parent stem. Parted from it by the knife, broken off by the storm, or snapped asunder by destructive hand, it dies, "and men gather them into bundles and they are burned." That which, while it was united to the tree, was

living, flourishing, fruitful, — apart from the tree is dry, withered, unlovely, fit only for the fire. More than on any other idea, except perhaps that of fruitfulness, *abiding* in Him is the life-lesson on which He lays the greatest stress in this parable of the Vine.

"Except ye abide in Me." That is the one condition of life. If that fails, all fails. If that holds, all holds. "Hold fast," says the Apostle Paul, "the beginning of your confidence, steadfast unto the end." Rejoice with trembling. Beware of all false confidences; of all tendency to a loosened hold on Christ. Jesus only, Jesus alway, Jesus altogether. If we hold fast our confidence, He will hold us fast, and no man, no force in earth or hell shall pluck us out of His hand. The arms that are round about and underneath us are everlasting arms, and the word of God, which is our life-blood and our strength, abideth for ever. We are perpetually bidden to watch and pray; to suffer nothing to come between us and Christ; we are to allow no cherished sin, no seductive temptation, no plausible sophistry of doubt or question to loosen for one moment our faith's clear grip on Christ.

To this end let us remember that prayer is the means by which faith is given, maintained, increased;

and that in proportion as we possess and exercise the praying spirit, shall we have resisting power against all external danger, cleaving power against all internal peril, enduring power that neither life nor death nor judgment can terminate. Let ours be, for a daily prayer, "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief!" Then and only then shall the character given to Abdiel by Milton be realised by us:—

> "The seraph Abdiel, faithful found
> Among the faithless, faithful only he;
> Among innumerable false unmoved,
> Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
> His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
> Nor number, nor example with him wrought
> To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
> Though single. From amidst them forth he passed
> Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained
> Superior, nor of violence feared he aught."

This is a noble ideal, and the self-distrusting spirit of the Christian may well sigh, "It is high, I cannot attain to it!" But it is possible, and must be aimed at supremely by every believer. What Paul said, the weakest can say, "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me." That is the secret of life, of continuance, of growth, of perfection, of the final glory of every saint of God. Self is against us; so are Satan and the world, a three-

fold dislocating and dissevering force against which we ourselves are utterly and for ever unable to contend. Well for us if we clearly understand and feel this. In our full and constant appreciation of this fact lies our safety. The more we realise this, the more we are weighted with a consciousness of this, the more we are likely to overcome; for then we shall all the more go to the Strong for strength, and by prayer—real, ardent, earnest prayer—we shall gain the faith which shall establish, strengthen, and settle us in the omnipotent love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

That we may abide in the truth, and dwell in God without the shadow of a fear of possible dislodgment, let us pray, pray much, pray always, and not faint. "Prayer," says Thomas Scott, "is the breath of Divine life; it is the pulse of the believing soul; by prayer faith puts forth its energy in apprehending promised blessings and receiving the Redeemer's fulness; in leaning on His Almighty arm; in overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil; by prayer we shall stand in the evil day, and having done all, mastered all, borne all, shall stand in the presence of God with exceeding joy!" Lord, teach us to pray!

"Abide in me, I pray, and I in Thee;
From this good hour, oh, leave me never more;
Then shall the discord cease, the wound be healed,
The lifelong bleeding of the soul be o'er.

"Abide in me; o'ershadow by Thy love
Each half-formed purpose and dark thought of sin
Quench, ere it rise, each selfish low desire,
And keep my soul as Thine, calm and divine.

"As some rare perfume in a vase of clay
Pervades it with a fragrance not its own;
So when Thou dwellest in a human soul,
All heaven's own sweetness is around it thrown.

"Abide in me. There have been moments blest
When I have heard Thy voice and felt Thy power;
Then evil lost its grasp, and passion, hushed,
Owned the divine enchantment of the hour.

"These were but seasons beautiful and rare,
Abide in me, and they shall ever be;
Fulfil at once Thy precept and Thy prayer,
Come and abide with me, and I in Thee!"

IX.

REVIEW.

"YE are the branches." Pregnant and deep-meaning words these; full of suggestions for serious thought and prayerful meditation! Let us gather together the lessons which have been briefly drawn herefrom that we may the better realise and the more perfectly remember the holy duties and the gracious privileges of those who are branches of the Living Vine.

The Christian believer is grafted into Christ, the True Vine, by simple faith in His atoning love, and by the power and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. He and his Lord are one, a unity of life and love. He is maintained in the divine life day by day by the truth of Jesus received and applied by the Light of God; this is his impelling influence, the circulating life-force that nourishes, strengthens, and fructifies his soul. As a branch, the believer sets forth and develops, shows to the world the holy nature,

moral beauty, and excelling virtues of the unseen Saviour. By his godly conduct and character he proclaims and makes manifest the glory of the Lord. As a branch he seeks to grow in personal power and piety, and in his stretch of influence for good on them that are without, and to secure the spiritual ingrafting of many into Christ the Vine. He lives a life of faith on the Son of God; that is the one abiding and essential tie, and that faith is maintained, sustained, increased by unwearying prayer for aid divine: and so the growing bias of his regenerated nature is more and more to possess and to make manifest the peerless graces of his Exemplar, his Life, his Love, his Lord.

O ye disciples of Jesus! I charge you to walk worthy of the high vocation whereunto ye are called! Let your fruit and your foliage, your deeds and your profession be fresh and fair, and seasonable and good. Creep and climb and grow and spread, until you reach the sunny table-lands of Paradise; then shall ye produce among the Vine branches of the upper Canaan fruits of Eshcol, ripe and perfect, to the eternal joy of your own soul, the eternal glory of your Lord!

It is by such a living, refreshing, and perpetual manifestation of Christ as this, that every individual

believer can powerfully preach Jesus, everywhere, effectually, and all the time. Nothing in the world, nothing that the wit of man can devise, no moral machinery, no evangelising organisation, no human ministries, however perfect in plan, however smooth in working, however forceful in speech and action, can so spread the Redeemer's kingdom, can so impress men with the richness of His mercy, the greatness of His moral power, the transcendent loveliness of His character, the bounty of His purpose or the justness of His claims, as can the holy eloquence, the silent winsomeness, the beneficent influences of a thoroughly pure and high-toned Christian life. "YE are the light of the world." "YE are the salt of the earth;" not your doctrines, nor your professions, nor anything else that is outside *yourselves*. "And thou shalt *be* a blessing!" That was God's promise to Abraham. The richest promise of all that he received. It is the king of blessings, and you and I, O reader, may possess it! To be a blessing! To catch and keep and reflect the smile of God is a glory that excelleth, a joy that abideth, an honour that endureth; a crown of glory that, like the fire-pillar, grows more divinely luminous as the shadows darken, gains a sevenfold

glory by the light touch of death, and shines with immortal lustre before the throne of God!

As the branches, in the liberal summer-time, spread their broad surfaces green and fair in the sunlight, and every leaf that flutters in the breeze is redolent of life and beauty, grateful and pleasant to every passer-by; so the branches of the Living Vine may be the objects of the esteem and admiration of observing eyes, and their cooling shadow and their kindly fruit may be a perpetual bounty and a convincing witness of the grace of God.

"Father and Saviour! Plant within each bosom
The seeds of holiness, and bid them blossom
In fragrance and in beauty, bright and vernal,
And spring eternal.

"Clothe every Vine branch with the fairest beauty;
Hang thereupon the purple grapes of duty;
So let them grow, the signs before men's vision
Of good, Elysian.

"Then place them in those everlasting gardens
Where angels walk, and seraphs are the wardens;
Where every plant that creeps thro' death's dark portal
Becomes immortal."

THE FRUIT.

"A fruitful bough,"
Lord, me endow
With life such branch to be ;
That I may show
And men may know,
My life is all from Thee.

With holy fruit,
O Heavenly Root,
Make my poor branch to bend ;
That I may hear
Thy word of cheer,
Thy "Well done!" at the end.

THE FRUIT.

I.

EXPECTATION.

"HEREIN is my Father glorified if ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples." These are the Master's words, and words more emphatic know I none. "So shall ye be my disciples." That is to say, "As ye are fruitful, as ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be owned, blessed, delighted in by Me; so shall ye be named, recognised, acknowledged by my Father; so shall ye be known and honoured amongst men." The common unassailable verdict in earth and heaven consequent on fruit-bearing shall be, "He is Christ's disciple; he is a Christian indeed; he is a branch of the living Vine."

The final cause of a vine is the production of grapes. Nothing else that the vine can do or be can possibly compensate for the want of that. If these are not

forthcoming the whole tree is naught. It fails to fulfil the one end of its existence. Its presence in the vineyard is a fraud, an incumbrance, and, as in the case of the barren fig-tree, its fitting fate is the axe and the fire. It has a name to live, but for all practical purposes the tree is dead; it has sunk into a noteless level with the barren thorn and the useless briar, whose end is to be burned.

This is true of the disciples of Jesus Christ. They are chosen by His grace, enclosed within the hedges of His love and care, grafted into Himself, cultivated, tended, that they bring forth fruit, much fruit; fruit that is to distinguish them from all the world besides. If they are branches of a Vine, then grapes are looked for as naturally as light and heat are expected from the rising sun; or as from grain carefully scattered in the furrow, men look for golden grain.

If there is but a little fruit, that is to be regarded as altogether unsatisfactory, for vines are very fruitful. To mend that state of things, as we shall see directly, the branch is pruned and trained that it may bring forth more fruit. "Fruit," "much fruit," "more fruit;" "these are the terms the Master uses; that is the measure of His expectation; this is the result He proposes to realise in

His disciples, and from this aim and purpose He will never move one jot. For this the branch is grafted, proved, pruned, trained, providentially handled, "that he may bring forth fruit." If he produces no fruit he is shed off, cast away as good for nothing. "What do ye more than others?"

It matters little what amount of show the Christian may make; to what dimensions he may seem to extend; what amount of green, fair foliage he may exhibit, nor how all this may flutter and rustle, and gleam in the breeze and sun. All this *and* fruit is well enough, and is in full accord with the nature of the new life. But all this and no fruit is a libel on the generous nature of the Vine, and the verdict of truth, in spite of all the gay garments that rustle and stir, is "good for nothing."

Here let every reader examine himself, prove his own self, and see whether he be in the faith or no. What says your life about this thing? What is the witness of your conscience? What says the church within whose fences you are trained and tended? What says the world whose curious and observant eyes are ever peering in among the foliage of your daily life? What says the Divine Husbandman who walks through His vineyard and

His garden to behold and pluck His pleasant fruits? Let us bring the thought fairly home to our mind. Let us present it fairly and clearly to our conscience. Let us apply this true Ithuriel's spear. "Let every man prove his own work." "Herein is my Father glorified," and herein alone, "if ye bear much fruit."

"If the root-stock be a vine,
'Twill bear the grapes that bring the wine;
If the vine produce no grape,
It cannot from the fire escape.

"If the grapes are few and small,
Better 'tis than none at all;
Pruning may increase the store,
Larger clusters than before.

"If the branch be in the vine,
If in life the two combine,
If the vine hath living root,
On the branch is living fruit.

"Jesus, I would fruitful be,
More and more resemble Thee;
Help me, Lord, much fruit to bear,
Clusters many, large and fair."

II.

GOOD FRUIT.

"MUCH fruit." It is no light thing, O man, to be a Christian. The honours that attach to this name are far away the highest and the noblest that a man can wear. The riches with which it can endow him far surpass the treasures of nobles and the wealth of kings. The peace and happiness it furnishes, all the resources of the world fail to supply; and the future heritage it ensures is nothing less or lower than joint-heirship with the crowned Christ. But its obligations are tremendous, its responsibilities are exceeding great. Its duties are many, and are as binding as the laws of eternal love can make them, and may not, even the least of them, be cheapened, slighted, or set aside.

The Saviour, as I have already said, speaks concerning fruit with an especial emphasis which denotes the vital importance He attaches to it. He plainly tells His disciples that this was the purpose

of their election. "I chose you," He says, "and appointed you that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide." This is His end, this is His aim, concerning every soul He saves. "And that your fruit should abide," not only in this season or in that, but like the trees that line the banks of the shining river, you should bear twelve manner of fruit; fruit for every month all round the year and all through the life; the fruit of "every good work," fruit such as that the Divine Exemplar bore while yet the Root was in the world's dry ground.

"Many a professor," says Salter, "who dwells where the full-orbed splendour of the Sun of Righteousness shines upon him, yet resembles more a native of Lapland or of Iceland. You would suppose that more than half his time he was not permitted to see the sun. His heart is cold and barren as the winter season. He is like a bare and leafless branch among the boughs of a snow-clad tree, through which the gusts of pride and passion sweep with fury, and upon which the dews and showers of gospel grace produce but the cold icicles of sin and death." From such a state, O so-called Christian, the Lord deliver thee!

"I saw," says one, "a bank covered with violets.

The sun was shining full upon it. Its genial warmth had opened the flowers and caused them to exhibit the most beautiful colours. But when I went to gather them, I found that, with the exception of a very few, their colour was all they had to recommend them. They were not the sort of violets which afford the sweet fragrance which we always associate with and expect to find in that flower. I was much disappointed, and had rather they had been called by another name."

This is no bad emblem of the Church of Christ. How many there are of fair and promising appearance, professing and seeming to be of the truth, and yet they fail to send up a sweet-smelling savour, fail to produce any fruit to the honour of His name. They are wanting in those holy devout dispositions and affections which their professions indicate. Should they not be called by another name? Have they really any part and lot in the Christ whose name they borrow and whose livery they wear? Are they not amongst those of whom it shall be said in the day when they shall most need, most hunger for recognition on the part of Jesus, "Depart from me, for I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity?" Let us apply the test, and question our own hearts and lives. "What fragrance have

I diffused abroad? What incense have I exhaled? What fruit have I borne?"

"Thanks to Thy sovereign grace, O God, if I
Am graffed in that True Vine a living shoot,
Whose arms embrace the world, and in whose root,
Planted by faith, our life must hidden lie.
But thou beholdest how I fade and dry!
Choked with a waste of leaf and void of fruit,
Unless Thy spring perennial shall recruit
My sapless branch, still wanting fresh supply.

"O cleanse Thou me, and make me to abide
Wholly in Thee, to bring forth fruit, as Thou,
In ripening clusters, Lord, and thus to grow.
Thou art the Truth. Thy promise is my guide,
By thee, Thy life, shall I be fructified;
Prepare me, when Thou comest, Lord, to show
Fruits answering to the stock on which I grow."

III.

LOVE.

"THAT ye bear much fruit." What then are the fruits which are natural to the living Vine? What are the grapes which are to grow on the living branches grafted into Him by the Spirit of God? In his Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul sums them all up in one comprehensive and expressive trinity of words, "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth:" and this to an enlightened conscience is an abundant and all-inclusive answer. But in his Epistle to the Galatian Church, the apostle expands that description and presents to our view the whole cluster of the fruits of holiness, fruits which are emphatically good fruit, rich and fair and fragrant exceedingly, fruit that may well be described as fruit that "cheereth the heart of God and man."

He first produces a catalogue of the works of the flesh, the evil and pernicious outcomes of the

natural depravity of the human heart; those wild grapes which are so emphatically denounced by the prophet Isaiah. Then he proceeds to say,—"But the fruits of the Spirit," in direct opposition to "the works of the flesh,"—the fruits of the Spirit, that is of the new life of the believer in Christ Jesus, of the new graffed branch of the living Vine, "are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law," no condemnation; for these there is nothing but the divine approval and all the high rewards that accompany and follow such duty well accomplished, such fruit well and bountifully borne.

What thinkest thou, O reader! of fruits like unto these hanging in Eshcol clusters on the branches of the living Vine? bending each living and prosperous bough in humble wealth and lowly beauty. Yet this is nothing other, and nothing less, than that which should be the result of the spiritual life alike in the individual and the church. We are to covet earnestly the best gifts. Surely this, after the gift of life in the soul, is the best of all, including all—to "bring forth good fruit to the honour and the praise of God. With the quaint old puritan poet, we may well be ambitious to be 'fruit-bearers' and pray for sufficient grace,—

'Grapes to grow, the grapes of Eshcol,
Many, large, and ripe and mellow,
Clustering virtues, growing graces,
Each one better than its fellow.'"

A brief review of the "basket of summer fruit," mentioned by the apostle as the fruits of the Spirit, will give us the opportunity of trying ourselves by this standard, and by this sure test to know whether we have any true and vital union with Christ the living Vine. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Love is the first fruit on the list, and may be said to be the worthiest, inasmuch as if it grows in full and genuine development, it necessitates the growth of the rest to keep it pleasant and harmonious company. It is intended here to represent that all-embracing charity and brotherly affection which desires, seeks, and is deeply interested in the utmost well-being of our brother man. Its inspiration is the love *of* God shed abroad in the believer's soul, which, first begetting love *to* God, makes its constant manifestations by "love and charity" to our fellow-men. "I am a man," said the old Roman, "and hence, nothing that refers to humanity can be indifferent to me." This is a noble sentiment, and was well worth handing down

through all the years. But the "living branch" in the true Vine takes a higher and diviner stand. "I am a Christian, and hence every soul for whom my Saviour died, is to me an object of brotherly sympathy and love." "Good will to man" was announced from heaven, as the cause and consequence of the advent of Christ Jesus, and "good will to man," in its best and profoundest and most inclusive meaning, is a certain and vital outcome of all real spiritual life. Where that is absent, the soul is no more grafted into Christ than is the loose dead faggot on the ground a branch of a living tree; he hath neither part nor lot in the living Vine. The true spirit of love, as Paul intended it to be understood, is contained in these lines:—

"It were a happy lot, if, every day,
One had the power some act of grace to do—
Some pious hope or effort to renew,
Where hope had swooned or strength been swept away
By suffering or grief! Oh, who can say
That he is wretched who hath still the power
To soothe one sorrow or to make one hour
Of pain or poverty seem briefer? They
Who pass through life, nor wish to shed the flower
They pluck upon a brother's path, be sure
Have not the blessed privilege to feel
The very chiefest bliss in life's great dower!
He who one sore doth salve, one hurt doth heal,
Hath founts of joy no world can make impure.'

This is the way the Master trod. This was the loving, tender, helpful, sympathetic spirit which sighed over the dumb man, wept over Jerusalem and the grave of Lazarus, and was "moved with compassion," with an overflowing love and sympathy that streamed in bounteous gifts and deeds of rare benevolence all the time. As He was, so must His servants be.

"By this we know
We live and grow
In Christ that noble vine;
This love to man
In us began
When we knew love divine.

"From then till now,
Our souls o'erflow
With love to all our race;
To all we would
Be kind and good,
Like Christ the Lord of grace.

"Love is the root,
Love is the fruit,
Love *is* the living vine,
And every bough
Must live and grow
In love, its life divine."

IV.

JOY AND PEACE.

ANOTHER of the good fruits produced by the Christian life is *Joy*. It is the natural result of the possession of the love of God. Conscious union with Christ imperceptibly produces it, and as certainly as flame produces light, or as spring produces flowers. "Shines the sun on duty done" is a wise old proverb that has its wisest application and truest meaning in the duty done for "love's" sake and the shining of God's approving smile on the doer's heart and life. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," says Milton; only, however, to be as perpetually extinguished. But in the Christian it becomes a fount, an overflowing stream, and ripples its musical prophecies in richer and sweeter harmonies as the end draws near. Let not the Christian look upon this fruit of quiet joy as being rare, difficult to find on other branches and impossible on his own. "Your joy may be full," the

Master said, and His words are not in vain. If "His joy remain in us," and that must be while His life is in us, our enjoyment of His grace and favour, of the blessings and benedictions which holiness brings, shall grow more and more, and "may be full." His desire is that all His people should seek it, have it, show it, so that men may see the surpassing power of grace to supply that happiness, that real happiness which the world always promises, yet never produces, and which "none but His loved ones know."

It is a sadly faulty and imperfect, if not impossible, religion, that which induces in "them that are without," the idea that religion is a melancholy thing, that its influences are depressing, that its yoke is not joyous but grievous, and that a Christian is debarred from the enjoyments of life, and is given over to an experience in which open, honest gladness has no place. On the other hand, the possessor of the genuine happiness of true religion can show that he has riches more than earth can give.

"Joy is a fruit which will not grow
In nature's barren soil;
All we can boast till Christ we know
Is vanity and toil.

"But where the Lord hath planted grace,
And made His graces known,
There, fruits of happiness and joy
Are found, and there alone."

Another specified production of the branches of the Vine is *Peace*. "Sweet Peace! Where dost thou dwell?" asks quaint George Herbert. The answer is, "In Christ," and all who are in Christ receive and reproduce the heavenly blessing. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you:" peace in Him, peace with God, peace in the conscience, peace in the soul, peace with all men. When the Lord giveth quietness, who shall make trouble? "Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

But I think this word is employed by Paul as representing one of the fruits of the Spirit, to denote the sublime virtue of *peace-making*. Not only does the Christian himself "follow peace with all men," but everywhere and all the time he seeks to heal the breaches between others, to throw oil on troubled waters, to bring about reconciliations, and to further hearty hand-grips between parted friends. There is a special beatitude for the bearers of this delicious fruit; "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall

be called the children of God." Men shall perceive the divine in them and acknowledge their evident loyalty to the God of peace.

"Once when I was in the South Seas," says a certain navigator, "Captain Morgan and I were backing out into deep water to get clear of some shallow coral patches, and to look for a better passage for our boat. The natives on the shore, thinking we were afraid of them, ran and broke off branches of trees and waved them towards us. Those green boughs were the token of friendship and the sign of peace."

Every living branch in Christ should ever be that signal, ever convey that message, ever have that interpretation of their character and their aim. Like the Prince of Peace—his monarch and his model—the true Christian is pre-eminently a "man of peace."

> The hand of peace is frank and warm,
> And soft as ring-dove's wing;
> And he who quells an angry thought
> Is greater than a king.

The Christian proffers that hand to all men. He will always endeavour to hold to the royalty which keeps rule over his own spirit, and will forever give

place unto wrath. It is a truly Christ-like sentiment that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of one of his heroes:—

> "I desire
> To reconcile me to his friendly peace;
> 'Tis death to me to be at enmity;
> I hate it, and desire all men's love."

No king ever loved peace more than King Henry the Seventh of England. He used to put this suggestive preface to all the treaties he made with other nations: "When Christ came into the world, peace was sung; and when He went out of the world again, peace was bequeathed." He might have added, that while He was in the world He made peace, gave peace, followed peace, and that after He had left the world He sent the Dove of peace to dwell in human hearts and to govern human lives; and that when His final conquest is obtained and His monarchy over mind is again universal and undisputed, peace will be universal, perfect—and then Paradise will be restored. May God hasten the happy day!

Meanwhile, let every believer in Christ remember the divine command and make a conscience of full obedience. "Seek peace, and pursue it;" so shall

he find that religion's ways are pleasantness, because her paths are peace.

"Thou makest me, O Lord,
At peace to be;
Thou makest sweet accord
'Twixt Thee and me.

"No peace the world can give,
No ease, no calm;
Restful in Thee I live,
And sing my psalm.

"Peace-bringer, Lord, Thou art,
Peacemaker too;
Help me to act Thy part,
And peace pursue.

"As through the world I go,
My grace increase,
That I may always grow
The fruits of peace!"

V.

PATIENCE—GOODNESS.

Amongst the most noble and notable fruits of holiness, which are grown for God's glory and men's benefit on the branches of the living Vine, the Apostle places *Longsuffering*. It is that feature of divinely beauteous charity which "beareth all things, endureth all things, suffereth long and is kind." It forever holds confidence in the all-perfect wisdom and goodness of God in the dispensations of His providence. Afflictions, pain, disappointment, and all the other so-called "ills" that flesh is heir to, are ever to the true Christian the wisely ordered interventions of divine love, the gracious evidences of divine control and care.

Wherever this grateful, holy and beautiful fruit is developed, the soul carries and copes with trials without fretting about them, without harassing others because of them. It is the direct opposite and antidote to a spirit of impulsive resistance, a

readiness to defend ourselves by threat, retort, or repartee. So far from determined on "having the last word," it is not easily provoked, and when provoked understands that "silence is golden," and acts accordingly. It is nobly indifferent and superior to the irritations of men and the disturbing influence of chafing tongues. He who bears the fruit of longsuffering is slow to anger, possesses his soul in patience, and, "bearing and forbearing," he is, more than others, nearest in likeness to his Lord, the all-perfect pattern of a man. These are wise good words hereupon :—

"To weary hearts, to mourning homes
God's meekest angel gently comes ;
No power has he to banish pain,
Or give us back our lost again ;
And yet in tenderest love our dear
And Heavenly Father sends him here.
There's quiet in that angel's glance ;
There's rest in his still countenance ;
He mocks no grief with idle cheer,
Nor wounds with words a mourner's ear ;
But ills and woes he may not cure,
He kindly trains us to endure.
Angel of Patience sent to calm
Our feverish brows with cooling palm :
To lay the storms of hope and fear,
And reconcile life's smile and tear ;
The throbs of wounded pride to still,
And make our own our Father's will !

O thou who mournest on thy way
With longings for the close of day ;
He walks with thee, my angel kind,
And gently whispers, 'Be resigned.'
Bear up, bear on, the end shall tell
The dear Lord ordereth all things well."

As a companion fruit for longsuffering we have *Gentleness:* a kindly, genial, and benignant spirit; a disposition to please others and to be pleased with others. It is in perfect contrast and opposition to ill-humour, bad temper, and when placed in a position of influence will

"Never use the harsher way,
When love will do the deed ;"

and even when the "harsher way" must be used, it shall be instinct with the gentleness which forgives while it punishes and sorrows while it condemns. I am afraid that many who are good people in the main, and of whom none may question their loyalty to Christ, do nevertheless sadly forget that Christianity, the life of Christ in them, should sweeten their disposition, amend their temper, mollify their manners, and remove from them all that is calculated to vex an enemy or repel a friend.

"Since trifles make the sum of human things,
And half our misery from our foibles springs;

Since life's best joy consists in peace and ease,
And few can save or serve, but all may please ;
Oh ! let th' ungentle spirit learn from hence
A small unkindness is a great offence.
Large bounties to restore, we wish in vain,
But all may shun the guilt of giving pain ;
To bless mankind with tides of flowing wealth,
With power to grace them, or to crown with health,
Our little lot denies ; but Heaven decrees
To all the gift of ministering to please ;
The gentle offices of patient love,
The mild forbearance at another's fault,
The taunting word suppressed as soon as thought :
On these Heaven bade the bliss of life depend,
And crushed ill-fortune when it made a friend !"

Of the same family of graces are the fruits of *Goodness* and *Meekness*. The former is that beneficence which delights in doing good. It engages in all the generous and helpful activities of a heart quick to feel and willing to help another's need. The world itself is quick to discern this character, and to appreciate it, too. "He is a good man, a generous man, a benevolent man," is a desirable testimony, for the Lord's sake, for a Christian to win from "them that are without." Happy is he of whom that witness is endorsed in heaven. *Meekness* holds the balance ever between pity for the wrong-doer, and just resentment for the wrong. The meek man is not easily ruffled. It takes two to make a quarrel,

and he will never be one of them. It is thoroughly consistent with true manliness and nobility of character, and there is a certain majesty about true meekness which dwarfs into contempt the disposition which is always ready and eager to assert its rights.

Robertson of Brighton remarks with great force:—"Two thousand years ago there was One who lived on earth, who lived the grandest life that ever was lived yet, a life that every thinking man, with deeper or shallower meaning, has agreed to call divine. I read very little in that life of His 'rights,' but I hear a vast deal respecting His wrongs, wrongs borne with a majestic and godlike silence. And what was His reward? His reward was the reward which God gives to all His true and noble ones,—to be cast out in His day and generation,—and a life-conferring death at last." Our Lord and Saviour was the very nobility and majesty of meekness, and every soul that lives in Him and manifests His spirit, is like the "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Herein, too, as in every other department of the perfect life, He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

"Plant, and root, and fix in me
All the mind that was in Thee!

Settled peace I then shall find ;
Jesu's was a quiet mind.

"Anger I no more shall feel,
Always even, always still,
Meekly on my God reclined ;
Jesu's was a gentle mind.

"I shall suffer and fulfil
All my Father's gracious will ;
Be alike in all resigned ;
Jesu's was a patient mind."

VI.

TEMPERANCE.

Amongst the more important and winsome fruits of righteousness which are to be manifested in the Christian character, that of *Temperance* finds special place. In the New Testament sense it stands for self-control. It denotes the manly and sober rule which the Christian keeps over all the tastes, tendencies and passions of his nature. His appetites, his tempers, his feelings, his impulses, everything in him that is in anywise a spring of action is to be kept under constant and due restraint. "Let your moderation be known unto all men," is an apostolic injunction that sums up the matter in few words. There is probably no single fruit of the Spirit which is more difficult to grow, and which ripens more slowly; but in its perfection it is unspeakably beautiful and good. There is none that, being grown, hangs more gracefully on the Christian character than this. Old Burton says,

"Temperance is a bridle of gold; he who uses it rightly is more a god than a man." "I have kept myself from mine iniquity," quoth the Psalmist, and while he did that, he was kingly and a king in a far nobler sense, and was crowned with a fairer diadem than attached to the throne of Israel. Shakespeare depicts it effectively when he says,

> "Brave conquerors! for so you are
> That war against your own affections,
> And the huge army of the world's desires."

And Feltham wisely says, "The boundary of man is moderation. When once we pass that pale, our guardian angel quits his charge of us." "The best government in the world," says Goethe, "is that which teaches us to govern ourselves," and that government, though the German philosopher, it is to be feared, did not understand the secret, is the indwelling life and spirit of Jesus Christ.

Speaking of temperance, Dr. South says, "It is a virtue which casts the truest lustre upon the person it is lodged in, and has the most general influence upon all other particular virtues of any that the soul of man is capable of. So general indeed is its influence, that there is hardly any noble quality or endowment of the mind, but must

own temperance either for its parent or its nurse. It is the greatest strengthener and clearer of reason, and the best preparer of it for religion, the sister of prudence, and the handmaid of devotion."

"Thrice noble is the man who of himself is king. There is nothing in the world more wholesome or more necessary for us to learn than this gracious lesson of moderation; without which, in very truth, a man is so far from being a Christian that he is not even himself. This is the rule of life, the governess of manners, the silken string that runs through the pearl chain of all virtues, the very ecliptic line under which reason and religion move without deviation, and therefore worthy of our best thoughts, of our most holy observance."

So writes Bishop Hall, and so testify all the great and good. Let it be our ambition to live a well-ordered life. Let the senses always be held in thorough subjection to the mind and conscience, and that these in turn may be thoroughly enlightened and controlled by the Spirit of Christ let us "add to our knowledge temperance." There are few things that do greater damage to the cause of Christ, that excite the scorn and opposition of the world, and hinder the progress of Gospel truth both without and within us, more than the absence from

the branches of this fruit of the living Vine, of whom it is said, "He pleased not Himself." In this thing, too, O servant of the Master! it is thy duty to be as thy Lord.

The path of self-denial
Still shall my soul pursue;
In every test and trial
Simply the *right* to do.

To all, my moderation
Shall clearly be made known;
In me, the new creation
Shall prove self overthrown.

When self and Satan tempt me,
The world my heart would win,
My Lord shall still exempt me
And keep my soul from sin.

The charmer shall not charm me,
The song shall not delight;
The cup shall never harm me,
That moves itself aright.

Ten thousand snares beset me,
Ten thousand in me dwell;
But none of these shall net me,
Nor bind me in their spell.

For Christ is my salvation,
On Him I still rely;
And 'NO' to all temptation
Shall still be my reply.

With firm and careful heeding,
I will myself control;
Nor suffer aught misleading
To warp my steadfast soul.

O Lord! Thy power within me,
The good work hath begun;
Thy power shall keep, and win me,
At last, a glad "Well done!"

VII.

FIDELITY.

Faith as a fruit of religious life is placed by the Apostle as conspicuous among the Christian graces. It has not here the meaning of saving faith; that lies at the very basis of Christian life. It means faithfulness, or perhaps more precisely, fidelity, and like the other fruits referred to has to do especially with our human relationships, rather than to those which have direct reference to God. It is to be truthful and righteous in all our dealings with and in all our bearing towards our fellow-men. It is to be firm and loyal to our principles, true to our engagements, faithful to our promises. Where this fruit is brought forth, the bearer changes not, nor falters on the line of duty, though he hath sworn to his own hurt. He is what the world expressively calls, "a man to be depended on." "His word," they say, "is as good as his bond," and you can rely upon him to be really all that he declares him-

self to be, and to do all that he undertakes to do. He holdeth fast and forever maintains his integrity. To every sort and species of guile, trickery, and deception he is a stranger, and neither for fear nor favour, neither for loss nor gain, neither for friend nor foe will he swerve one jot from the straight line of righteousness and truth.

"Honour" is one of the world's virtues, and none may say that it does not exist and even shine with real lustre among those to whom real religion is but a name; but to what depths of dishonour hath the world dragged it down, so that it shall call him "a man of honour who pays his gambling debts in preference to his tradesmen's bills!" True honour shines clear and bright in the man whose life is shaped after the Christly pattern, and whose every action is inspired by the spirit of the living Christ within. He is the man of clean hands, honest conscience, and a pure heart.

"True conscious honour is to feel no sin,"

says Horace, but that elegant Roman knew nothing of the gracious and glorious possibilities open to man in this respect by reason of "the Fountain" which is "open for sin and uncleanness." The poet Wordsworth writes:—

> "Say, what is honour? 'Tis the finest sense
> Of justice which the human mind can frame;
> Interest, each lurking frailty to disclaim,
> And guard the way of life from all offence
> Suffered or done."

And that is the bright unspecked fruit that must hang upon the life and character of every man that aims to be a Christian indeed; and none may retain the Christian's vital inspiration who does not strive, with a holy ambition, to win and wear the highest, purest, noblest "honour," the bright reflection of the Saviour's character, which "honour have all His saints." This "Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile" will

> Never wear a mask;
> Never act a lie;
> Nor shun an irksome task,
> In hope to gain thereby.
>
> Transparent to the view
> His life will bear the light;
> He ever loves the true,
> He ever does the right.
>
> He spurns the cunning plea,
> Hates every fraud and wile,
> A Christian aye will be,
> In whom there is no guile.
>
> His epitaph who scan,
> Shall read,—his life path trod,—
> "Here lies an honest man,
> The noblest work of God."

Such a man is good and great and beautiful whatever his lot, lofty or lowly, in social life. Such an one is formed after the model of the guileless man of Nazareth; such an one is a "fruitful bough" and bends beneath a wealthy weight of fruit, and God and man shall delight in its fragrance and its taste. Our great dramatist hath limned him in four pregnant lines,

> "His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles;
> His love sincere, his thoughts immaculate;
> His tears pure messengers sent from the heart;
> His heart as far from fraud as heaven from earth."

This type of man at his noblest and best it is the nature and mission of true religion to produce: and where this kind of moral fruit is not forthcoming, the inspiration of the Perfect One is absent, and all else is of no value. The fruitless professor is a dead branch, cast forth and withered and ready for the fire. O ye Christians! remember whose name ye bear, whose garb ye wear, whose honour ye profess to hold in your keeping! What is your *character?* That is the pivot on which turns everything. That alone can stand the testing fire which shall try every man's work what sort it is. Let the prayer of the Psalmist be a daily cry from the

deeps of your moral being, "Create within a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me!" Then shall ye be fruitful in every good word and work! This fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, redolent of fragrance, rich in blessing, and rife with holy influences for the glory of God and the well-being of man.

Lord, how I long
Thy faithful follower to be!
Lord, make me strong
In my integrity.

Control my will,
And make me loyal, Lord, to Thee;
To serve Thee still
With true fidelity.

Hold Thou me fast,
O Christ, that all the world may see,
I, to the last,
Keep my consistency.

Even unto death
True and unswerving would I be,
And, strong in faith,
Act always faithfully.

Thy Spirit give
To stablish, aid, and strengthen me,
That I may live
With Thee eternally.

VIII.

CLUSTERS.

The vine, as everybody knows, always produces its pleasant fruits in clusters; never in units, always in bunches; and the finer and healthier the tree is, the larger, more symmetrical and attractive do the clusters grow. There is surely a lesson herein, also, for all to learn who desire to be "fruitful branches" of the True Vine. The graces which go to make up a complete and harmonious Christian character, are both manifold and various. Those specimens, if I may call them so, which are contained in the statement of the Apostle Paul, and which have been briefly examined and described, are representative of many more; and the divine intention unquestionably is, that they should all of them grow on the individual "branch," all of them be reproduced in every Christian character. How many of the professed disciples of our blessed Lord and Master are there, who, while they possess and manifest certain

indubitable excellencies, and clearly exhibit certain Christian graces, do, nevertheless, appear to much and serious disadvantage by reason of the total, or almost total, absence of other essential Christian virtues. Their moral defects cause so many gaps in the cluster, that, like a ragged, ill-shapen, and sparsely furnished bunch of grapes, they fail effectively to manifest the fruit aright which they actually do produce; and if they do not bring their religious honesty and sincerity into serious doubt, do unquestionably fall far short of what they ought to be, and what they might be, and what they must try to be, if they are to be really well-written epistles, setting forth the true character of the Master, known and read of all men.

In these defective fruit-bearers there is no proportion, no symmetry, no sign or promise of that ultimate sanctification and holiness which will make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Whatever of good there is in them is largely discounted in moral value as representations of the Christly character, and as influences for good on those who dwell within their circle. They are the subject of sore anxiety and discomfort to their godly comrades, and unfavourably impress "them that are without the knowledge of God," and whom

it is their sacred duty to win to Christ. One exhibits the fruit of benevolence, but his temper is fitful, uncertain, and at times is altogether unrestrained. Another bears the fruit of fidelity; nobody can question his integrity or the purity of his motives; but he is cold, hard, morose, ungentle. A third is full of energy, courage, action, but these excellent fruits are spoiled by lack of patience, and his longsuffering is conspicuous by its absence. A fourth, again, is genial, gentle, sunny and kindly almost to a fault, but he is altogether deficient in firmness, strength of principle, stability of character, and is easily led away: and so on through all the defective combinations possible to an ill-formed Christian character.

It is to be feared that, too often, the absence of certain fruits of the Spirit not only becomes chronic, but has a very noxious and destructive influence on such as do exist, and imperils the whole religious life. In full consciousness of this the apostolic teachers ever urge the followers of the Perfect Man to strive after moral completeness. They are to "perfect that which is lacking;" they are to grow into the "full stature of a man in Christ Jesus;" they are to seek to be "sanctified wholly;" and to be "perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

Let us remember that the gifts of God are "without partiality," either as to the individual who desires them, or the kind and character of the gifts themselves. "The Spirit," with all His fructifying power, "is given without measure," and "no good thing" will be withheld from those who seek it with all their heart. When we are told to "covet earnestly the best gifts," not one of them is excepted, and surely the best of all gifts are those which will make more perfect and complete our moral likeness to our glorious Lord.

Let the Christian believer cherish a holy discontent concerning so-called weaknesses, shortcomings, infirmities, failings, most of which are sins that need to be forgiven, and faults that should be amended; and there is really no reason, with infinite power and love to appeal to, that our religious character should be dwarfed by them, or left lopsided and ungainly, for the want of Christian graces that are all "possible to them that believe." These evils and defects to which we are in the habit of giving so mild a name, are faults to be eradicated, sins to be mourned for, and harmful diseases to be cured. Christian fruit, the grapes of godliness, should be grown in clusters, and

manifested in such harmonious and blended fashion as to be

> "Witnesses to all mankind,
> Jesu's is a perfect mind."

"Behold the servant of the Lord !
I wait Thy guiding eye to feel,
To hear and keep Thy every word,
To prove and do Thy perfect will ;
Joyful from all *my* works to cease,
Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

"Me if Thy grace vouchsafe to use,
Meanest of all Thy servants, me ;
The deed, the time, the manner choose,
Let all my fruit be found in Thee ;
Let all my works in Thee be wrought,
By Thee to full perfection brought.

"Here then to Thee Thine own I leave ;
Mould as Thou wilt my passive clay ;
But let me all Thy stamp receive ;
But let me all Thy will obey ;
Serve with a single heart and eye,
And to Thy glory live and die."

IX.

THE PATTERN.

Once upon a time Jesus Christ, the Living Vine, did Himself branch out before human eyes, bright and beautiful with leafage and bearing ever a wealth of richest, ripest fruit. O my reader! have you studied that fair vision? that branch of the Lord's right hand planting? that Tree of Righteousness? that Plant of Renown? Guile was never on His lips; grace was poured out of His mouth; love beamed in His eye, and suffused His face with tenderness unutterable. From His tongue distilled all kindness and good will. Truth sat upon His brow. His hands, clean hands, and pure from iniquity, were always lifted to bless, stretched forth to save, or flung wide to welcome. Amid provocation, malignity and scorn, He was meek and lowly. When He was reviled, He reviled not again, but in beautiful gentleness, patience and long-suffering He possessed His soul. His very gar-

ments had a virtue in them; His deeds were mercy, His word was truth, His look was love. When those holy feet had trod the thorny path of duty and of pain, He Himself crushed out the glorious cluster of His ripe self-sacrifice in the winefat of Calvary which He trod alone, expressed the purple life-blood, and sent the vital inspiration streaming down the ages, that every believer in Him might, like Him, be faithful and fruitful too!

This is our ideal. As He was, so are we to be in this world. If we are knit into Him by living faith, then His life is in us, His Spirit inspires us, and through that same Spirit we can reproduce the man Christ Jesus in our daily life. A true Christian is a Christ-man, a Christ-like man. The fruit which He bare, they bear. "The works which I do shall ye do also, and greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto my Father," for thereby the Holy Spirit hath come upon us, and "whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, *it shall be done!*"

Here then, once for all, we can test the reality of our own Christianity. "A tree is known by its fruits." A Christian is known by his life; he is known by his behaviour, his doings; he is known by his practical and unselfish devotion to the glory

of God and the good of men; he is known by the reflected light he casts along the path he travels, and by his clear exhibition of the glory of the Lord.

In the day when this same Jesus, the Man whom God hath ordained to judge us, shall divide the sheep from the goats,—a final and impassable division,—the day when "come, ye blessed," and "depart, ye cursed," are portioned out to every man according to his meed, it is what we have done, what practical fruit we have borne, that will decide our destiny; and according as "ye did it," or "ye did it not," shall we be condemned or approved. Let the Man whose name is the Branch, be our life-pattern as well as our life, so shall we bear much fruit; so shall we increase in moral service, strength and grace; so shall we produce in ever-expanding, ever-multiplying clusters, fruit unto holiness; so shall we rejoice in the day of the Lord!

"Holy Lamb, who Thee confess,
Followers of Thy holiness,
Thee they ever keep in view,
Ever ask what shall we do?

"Governed by Thy only will,
All Thy words we would fulfil,
Would in all Thy footsteps go,
Walk as Jesus walked below.

"While Thou didst on earth appear,
Servant to Thy servants here;
Mindful of Thy place above,
All Thy life was prayer and love.

"Such our whole employment be,
Works of faith and charity;
Works of love on man bestowed,
Secret intercourse with God.

"Early in the Temple met
Let us still our Saviour greet;
Nightly to the Mount repair,
Meet our praying Pattern there.

"There by wrestling faith obtain
Power to work for God again,
Power His image to retrieve,
Power like Thee, O Lord, to live.

"Vessels, instruments of grace,
Pass we thus our happy days,
'Twixt the Mount and multitude
Doing and receiving good.

"Glad to pray and labour on,
Till our earthly course is run,
Till we on the sacred tree,
Bow the head and die like Thee!"

THE HUSBANDMAN.

Thou, O my God, the Husbandman,
My Owner and my Master art ;
Only Thy power and wisdom can
Make fruitful my poor barren heart.

Dig round my roots ; my branches prune ;
Thy training, tending I implore ;
Watch, ward, and aid me, night and noon,
And make me fruitful more and more.

THE HUSBANDMAN.

—o—

I.

PROPERTY.

The Vine, the Branches, the Fruit: only three words, and yet with what abundant and significant wealth of meaning! Sift seriously, O reader mine, what I have said to thee concerning each. Value and hoard whatever of golden grain thou findest; then let any chaff of mine be blown to the winds of heaven.

The Vine, your life; the Branch, your faith; the Fruit, your conduct. That is the sum and substance of the three. A fourth and last word has now to occupy our thoughts,—"My Father is the Husbandman." Many and solemn, full of guidance, warning and encouragement withal are the ideas suggested by this word—Husbandman.

The God and Father of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ is the absolute proprietor of the Vine. He is the Lord of the vineyard. He is all and in all. "I am Thine," said Jesus in that marvellous prayer, that strangely touching talk with His Father that preceded His Passion, "I am Thine, and all Mine are Thine." Hence, O Christian, you see He hath an indefeasible right to all the fruit you bear.

He, the Husbandman of this parable, is our Creator, for "it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves." He is our Provider and Sustainer too. We have nothing that we have not received; possess nothing in our own right; we are pensioners, absolutely, on His bounty alone, for to us and every creature that His hands hath made, "He giveth life and breath and all things." He alone keepeth our soul in life. He is our Purchaser. For when we were sold under the law, sold under sin, He bought us back to Himself again. Ye are bought with a price, not of silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. By this threefold and all-inclusive right, God is our great Proprietor, and His claim, as with His glory, He will not give to another. "All souls are mine!" He says, and demands His rights.

Not only is He the Proprietor of the Vine and its branches, but His also are all the essential sup-

plies necessary for life, and for growth, and for fruit-bearing. The soil in which the Vine is planted, the sunlight that shines down upon it, the plentiful rain and copious dews that water it, the life that circulates through all its veins,—all are His, all are from Him; and as it is in nature, all in their purpose and mission, must accomplish that which He pleases and prosper in the thing whereto He sends it. Here is the great fact, too often lost sight of, too much ignored: "Ye are not your own." Our bounden duty, therefore, is to live to Him, to serve Him, to glorify Him. Never question His claims. Never dispute, divide, or forget your allegiance. Never ignore your responsibilities. Never forget your God.

His proprietorship, let us ever loyally remember, is not only absolute, but is absolutely beneficent. His tender mercies are over all His works, and He loveth and careth for all that His hands hath made. He is good and doeth good, and throughout the whole of His universal government His royal rule is love. Loyalty to His laws cannot possibly bring aught else than happiness and advantage to the work of His hands. "It is the nature of every artificer," says Dr. South, "to tender and esteem his own work;" and if God should not love His

creatures it would reflect some disparagement upon His workmanship, that He should make anything He could not own. "God's power never produces what His goodness cannot embrace."

If this be true of creation in general, much more must it be true of man, immortal man, made in His own image, redeemed by His own blood! Much more is it true of regenerated man, inspired with His love, instinct with His life, created anew in the likeness of His dear Son. "A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord," special favour, and is His peculiar handiwork, the chosen delight of His love, the elect recipient of His richest bounties, the object of His peculiar and tenderest care. In the "Husbandman" let us see then the Beneficent Proprietor, the Owner of the Vine and its branches in whom He delighteth, and on whom He hath lavished His love and regard.

O come let us raise
Our voices and praise,
The Maker of all,
At His feet let us fall,
Offering to Him again all He hath given.
The best that is ours,
Our hearts and our powers,
Glad songs that we sing Him,
Thanks that we bring Him,
These are the incense most grateful to Heaven.

Evening and morning thus,
Ever He cares for us,
Blessing, renewing,
Warding off ruin,
These are His works, and His goodness we prove ;
When we are sleeping,
Watch he is keeping ;
When we arise,
He gladdens our eyes
With the sunshine of mercy, the glow of His love.

All passeth away,
But God liveth aye,
And changeth in naught,
Eternal His thought,
His word and His will are steadfast and sure ;
Never His grace
Or His mercy decays,
It heals the sad heart
From its deadliest smart,
Giving it life that shall ever endure.

God, Thou my crown !
Forgiving look down,
And hide from Thy face,
Through Thy pitying grace,
All my transgressions against Thy command ;
Henceforth, O rule me,
Guide me and school me,
As Thou seest fit ;
My ways I commit
All to Thy pleasure, Thy merciful hand.

My God and my King,
Thine own will I bring,

Mine Owner art Thou,
Before Thee I bow,
My Maker, Preserver, Redeemer, and Friend,
To Thee while I live,
My all will I give,
On Thee when I die
My soul shall rely,
Then joyful to Thee and Thy heaven ascend !

II.

CULTURE.

"My Father is the Husbandman." To Him, then, the Saviour in this parable assigns the work of cultivation. It was He who planted the Vine. He sent forth His only begotten Son into the world to save us from the death and doom which sin had inflicted on our race. He it was who in infinite mercy and love to poor sinners planted the Christ as a root in the dry ground of our fallen and pitiful human nature, that as the Son of Man He should be Brother to our humanity and impart to us a divine and recovered life. He, the Father, set this Plant of renown on our sin-cursed earth, that He might put forth new boughs like a plant, might unite to Himself, vitalise and fructify every soul that should believe on His name; that once again, as in the days of man's unfallen state, they should bear fruit unto holiness and everlasting life.

Having planted the Vine, the Eternal Father

is also represented as the Vinedresser, in whose charge and keeping the Vine is placed, and whose province it is to apply whatever skill and power, wisdom and interest may suggest to give nurture, assistance, protection to the plant, so that it may grow strong and healthy, and that it may produce the due return of fruit to grace His table and fill His waiting wine-fat with wealth of purple grapes.

Bear witness, O Christian, to the cultivation which your gracious God hath bestowed on you, the pains and care and patience which He hath brought to bear on you. "What could I do more to my vineyard that I have not done unto it?" That is His own inquiry, what answer can you make? Ponder on the dealings of His paternal providence, the gracious operations of His Spirit, the bounty of His Gospel grace. Try to recount the ordinary mercies of your life, mercies and blessings that are recurring every day. Think upon His special and extraordinary visitations, in Providence and privilege both. Surely never vine branch grew in a more favoured spot than that in which your lot is cast. Never vine was so digged about and fostered, so sunned and succoured, so watched and watered, so fed and favoured as you have been ever since

you were grafted into the parent Vine! Hear what quaint George Herbert has to say on this subject:—

> "Lord, with what care hast Thou begirt us round!
> Parents first season us, then schoolmasters
> Deliver us to laws. They send us bound
> To rules of reason; holy messengers,
> Pulpits and Sundays, sorrow dogging sin,
> Afflictions sorted, blessings of all sizes,
> Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in;
> Bibles laid open; millions of surprises;
> Blessings beforehand; ties of gratefulness;
> The sound of glory singing in our ears;
> Without, our shame; within, our consciences;
> Angels and grace; eternal hopes and fears."

If we carry out the expressive figure which our Saviour employs in this parable, the duty incumbent on us of bearing much fruit will be evident to every honest interpreter of this instructive similitude. What pains hath the divine and beneficent Husbandman taken with us to produce in us the power and disposition to bring forth good fruit! What summer suns! What morning showers! What evening dews! What balmy breezes! What constantly recurring seasons! What perpetual and liberal use of means! All are brought to bear on us to stimulate, and energise, and

fructify our spiritual life! And with what return? "Herein is my Father glorified if ye bear much fruit." For this He labours; for this He waits; for this He comes to see. What finds He? Ripe and grateful clusters? The holy and serviceful outcomes of godly deeds or—"Nothing but leaves?" We know what came to the fig-tree in the parable when for three successive years He came and found no fruit thereon. On it sentence was pronounced —"Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" And although at the instance of the vinedresser it was spared for one season more, we know that if *that* was turned to no better account the axe was to do its work. "After that thou shalt cut it down." We know what happened to the fig-tree by the wayside when the Saviour and His disciples came to it for refreshment and food, and found "nothing but leaves." "Let no fruit grow on thee for ever," was the startling sentence, "and straightway the fig-tree withered away." Surely these solemn statements are placed on the holy page for serious thought and study. The professing Christian, remembering the abundant mercies of the Lord, may well ask himself the question:—

> "Whence to me this waste of love,
> All His drawings from above?"

What are the returns I am making for such love, such bounty, such patience, such assiduous cultivation and untiring care? am I producing fruit, much fruit? or am I bearing—"nothing but leaves?"

"Nothing but leaves! The Spirit grieves
Over a wasted life;
Over sins indulged while conscience slept,
Over vows and promises all unkept,
Over mercies misused and sins unwept,
And gathers from years of strife
Nothing but leaves."

Ah, who can thus the Master meet,
Bearing but withered leaves?
Ah, who shall dare at the Master's feet,
And before the tremendous judgment-seat,
When the Lord and the barren branch shall meet,
To lay down nothing but leaves,
Nothing but leaves!

The husbandman toils with tireless skill,
And labours the live-long day
To nourish and foster and train and till,
With bountiful blessing and kind goodwill,
To make my sluggardly soul to thrill
With vig'rous and fruitful life, but still,
He says as He searches, "Nay,
There is nothing here but leaves,
Nothing but leaves!"

O God of my life! I stand in amaze,
That after so many reprieves,
And nothing but leaves,

The patience endureth, and judgment delays!
O help, Lord, that I for the rest of my days
May be fruitful, not barren, and live to thy praise,
With fruit in rich clusters of virtue and grace,
Much fruit, barren past that retrieves,
And bring forth, as harvest doth bring forth its sheaves,
Clusters and leaves!

III.

TRAINING.

In the cultivation of the vine, the careful and constant training of the branches is a matter of much importance and requires the husbandman's best attention and skill. The branches of the vine are strengthless and pliant, and their tendency is to droop, to lie prone along the ground, and to grovel in the dust. Left to themselves they will hug the earth, and creep along the soil. All this will cover them with dust, rob them of the sunlight, and render their leaves flaccid, yellow, sickly, and like to die. Beneath and among the prostrate boughs and leaves, will dwell multitudes of noxious insect tribes, which will increase and multiply, will totally destroy the foliage and devour the tender grapes.

Altogether powerless to rise, nay, even content to lie and suffer harm, the wayward and earth-

prone bough puts forth its tendrils in ever-increasing number and strength. It curls them round about the stones, wraps them around convenient thorn or stalwart weed, and clasps in mistaken and perilous friendship, vain, unworthy stays equally low and prostrate as itself.

Then comes the husbandman, the vinedresser. He lays hold of the prostrate branch, lifts it up from its dark, dank, dirty bed among the weeds and briars; and in doing so, he snaps without mercy every tendril that binds it down to earth. By this means he frees it from its false friends, delivers it from its dangerous bondage, rids it of parasites that nest upon and underneath it, that would surely be its ruin, preying and thriving as they do, upon its very life. He shakes off the dust and all other undesirable and noxious accumulations, and raises it carefully, tenderly as if he loves it. Then he proceeds to pinch off the dead and dying leaves, and then he trains and trellises it in this direction, or in that, around upright pole or neighbouring tree, or along wall or lattice, always keeping in view what is best for the branch, best for the vine, best for the fruit. Now the breeze, fresh, bracing, invigorating, can blow through it; the genial sunshine can woo and warm and nourish

it; the leaves and shoots and tender buds or clusters can find full room to grow; and the entire vine gains in beauty, fruitfulness, and strength.

Who can mistake the meaning of all this? who can fail to interpret the parable? Who can miss the tender beauty of the lesson it is intended to convey?

Not thou, O Christian, disciple of Jesus, branch of the living Vine! It tallies too perfectly as a picture of thine own wayward weakness, thine own proneness to seek the dust, thine own peril from false supports. It depicts too clearly thy Heavenly Father's dealings with thee, severe yet salutary, painful yet profitable, and tenderly gracious all the time, for thee to misread the message in this parable which the Master sends.

Let us study our picture here humbly and honestly. How weak we are, even without strength. How strong is our tendency downward and earthward! How sadly inclined we are to creep and to crawl where we ought to climb and rise! We set our affections upon earthly things, upon harmful things, and cling with ever-strengthening and contented clasp to vain and injurious supports and trusts, as we lie and grovel in the dust. In such sad plight all noxious and destructive influences

have us at their mercy: they eat as doth a canker, they despoil us of all that is worth the having, and, alas, imperil our very life!

Then comes our gracious Vinedresser; He comes, though at first we know it not, to our deliverance and relief. The divine Husbandman will not suffer us thus to wrong our better nature. He will not permit us so to put in peril our spiritual life. He sees our low and helpless state. He stoops to undertake for us, and to lift us up. He snaps the tendrils, breaks the ties that hold us down; not without much pain and shrinking on our part; much real sorrow, and, alas, much repining too. He shakes us from the dust which lies thick and clotted on our soiled and sordid souls; vigorous shakings, mark you, that interfere sadly with our love of ease, our low content, our base delights; shakings that nature is distressed by, that ignorance questions, and against which self-will rebels, for the gathered soil cleaves closely and the two are loth to part.

"God made us," says Thomas Adams, "for eternity; and His aim in all He does is to train us up for it and bring us happily into it. Hence the necessity of sharp usage of us sometimes, to break the strong cords that bind us to the world; and to

force us to lift up our heads, and to take part with God in His gracious designs."

"Afflictions from above
Are angels sent
On embassies of love;
A gracious legion, at thy birth,
Of chastening pains were given,
To pluck thy loves and hopes from earth,
And lift them high
Above the sky
To dwell for aye, in God and heaven."

So the wise and gracious Vinedresser lifts up with firm and gentle hand the souls He means to save, the hearts He means to purify, the thoughts He means to direct, the desires He means to elevate. He trains and bends them in whatsoever direction and shape His all-perfect love and wisdom seeth best. Seldom, perhaps, in the direction and the form the branch itself would prefer, but as its pliancy is its great danger when left to itself, so it is its greatest happiness and security when it is "committed to a faithful Creator." "Let Him do what seemeth Him good."

"Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be!
Lead me by Thine own hand;
Choose out the path for me.

I dare not choose my lot ;
I would not if I might ;
Choose Thou for me, O God,
So shall I walk aright."

And all the while the lifting, loosening, shaking, directing, training processes of the Father's love and care are going on, the branch is in His hand, kept, sustained, supported. His gracious providence is ever His people's help ; and evermore they are cheered, stimulated, strengthened, by the free fair sunlight of His favour, and are enriched and prospered by all the heavenly and inspiring influences that flow down from sun and sky.

" But oh, Thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Thou art, of all Thy gifts, Thyself the crown !
Give what Thou canst, without Thee we are poor ;
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away."

O God ! Thy kind and watchful care I bless,
Which saves from ill, and aids my helplessness :
Still grant Thy pity in my needy plight ;
Raise from the dust, and train me to the light.

Prone to lie basely, ever on the ground
With low desires and sensual likings bound,
Weak, wayward, selfish, still to earth I cleave,
For ever loth my carnal lusts to leave.

O lift me ! raise me ! Husbandman divine.
My willing soul would yield to Thy design ;

With firm, but kindly hand, still do Thou tear
My soul away from each low-thoughted care.

Shake off from me the sin that closest clings,
And train my soul up in all holy things;
And bless, and lead, and lift my soul on high;
Thou the Vinedresser; fruitful vine branch I.

IV.

PRUNING.

THE aim and purpose of the husbandman is to make the vine strong, healthy, and above all things fruitful, so that at all seasonable periods it should hang heavy with purple grapes. At times all his pains in cultivation and training are ill repaid. Though the plant is strong and hardy, the fruit is both poor in quality and meagre in quantity. He proceeds, therefore, to take other and more rigorous measures to gain the desired end. New methods must be tried, new means employed, to make those barren branches bend with fruit.

See the husbandman standing before that enormous bough from whence the twigs and smaller branches are growing in rich and manifold profusion; and everywhere the leafage is green, abundant, luxurious. But his observant eye discovers no bloom of promise, nothing that betokens the coming of good grapes. It is barren and un-

fruitful. He comes again, and in his strong right hand there gleams the sharp blade of the pruner's knife. With quiet decision he cuts aud severs until all the leafy glories are strewn around his feet. From many a gaping wound the vine is bleeding as though it would bleed its life away. But by every scar new shoots will rise; through all that is left, more rush of strength will flow, and by and by, purple clusters will hang, the precious and beautiful consequences of the application of the relentless knife.

"Every branch that beareth not fruit, He purgeth it," pruneth it, "that it may bring forth more fruit." Sharp is the stroke, O Christian, and keen the knife; but it is held in the hand of the Husbandman, and full well He knows when and where to cut, and when and where to spare. He wounds, it is true, wounds deeply, wounds often, but He wounds to heal. "He woundeth, but His hands make whole;" and the compensations that follow, of flower and fulness, of fruit and flavour, drown the memory of the grief in a summer tide of healthy growth, a vintage rich in the fruits of holiness, high service, and enjoyment, fruits which are earnests of eternal life.

Speaking of the "afflictions of the righteous," the pruning operations to which every branch in

the living Vine is at some time subjected, that quaint old puritan Brooks says, "Why should you fret, fling, fume, seeing God designs you good in it all? The bee sucks sweet honey out of bitter herbs; so God will by afflictions teach His children to suck sweet knowledge, sweet obedience, and sweet experiences out of all the trials and afflictions of their life. That scouring and rubbing which frets others shall make them shine the brighter; and that weight which keeps others under, shall but make them, like the palm-tree, grow better and higher.

"Remember, too, that the stars shine the most brightly on the darkest nights; torches give the best light when beaten; grapes yield most wine when most pressed; spices smell sweetest when pounded; vines are all the better and bear more fruit for bleeding; gold looks the brighter for scouring; juniper smells the sweetest when it is in the fire; camomile, the more you tread on it, the more you spread it; the Jews were always at their best when they were the most afflicted; the Athenians would never mend but when they were in mourning; the Christ's cross, said Luther, is no letter, and yet it hath taught me more than all the letters in the book.

"Afflictions are the saint's best benefactors to

heavenly affections: where afflictions hang heaviest, corruptions hang loosest and lightest. And grace that is hid in nature, as sweet water in rose-leaves, is then most fragrant when the fire of affliction is put under to distil it out. Grace is most glorious when it is most clouded. Pliny, in his Natural History, writeth of certain trees growing in the Red Sea, which being beat upon by the waves, stand like a rock immovable the more they are battered by the roughness of the sea. In the sea of afflictions God's people stand like a rock; they shall be immovable and invincible, and the more the waves of trouble beat upon them the better they shall be, the more they shall thrive in grace and godliness. By affliction they gain more experience of the power of God supporting them, of the wisdom of God directing them, of the grace of God refreshing and cheering them, and the goodness of God quieting and quickening them to a greater love for holiness and a keener delight in Him." All the experience of God's faithfulness endorses this testimony and affirms that this witness is true.

"As the harpstrings only render
All their treasures of sweet sound,
All their music glad and tender,
Firmly struck or tightly bound;

So the hearts of Christians owe,
Each its deepest, sweetest strain,
To the pressure of their woe,
To the tension of their pain.

"Spices crushed, their pungence yield,
Trodden scents their sweets respire,
And the incense is revealed
When 'tis cast into the fire.
Bleeding hearts, like prunèd vines,
Richest, sweetest fruits doth yield;
And through suffering, toil and shame,
Loss and grief, and martyr's flame,
Heavenly incense is distilled."

The wisdom and experience of the husbandman leads him ofttimes to lop and cut one branch that another branch may be advantaged and made more fruitful thereby. As in Our blessed Lord and Master's case, so in the experience of many of His servants suffering is sent, and pain and loss, that some other soul may be saved, some other living branch made fruitful, and that the general health and prosperity of the whole vine may be secured. Much of this pruning and purging process is mysterious. Our heart and flesh fail full often because we cannot understand it; because we misread it; because we are too weak-witted and too short-sighted to perceive the husbandman's design. Let us ever remember that the Vinedresser

thoroughly and perfectly understands His work and office, and always pursues the best ends, using the wisest means to bring forth *fruit.*

Let us ever remember, also, that the Husbandman is also the Proprietor, He is the owner of the vine, and the vine and its branches are the objects of His special interest, affection and delight. Throughout all His vast and infinite estates, this Plant of Renown, this "Noble Vine," and its living boughs, He loveth most and best of all. Be sure that His knife will never cut to harm that which is to Him even as the apple of His eye.

My God gives me a cross to bear;
The needful stroke He will not spare,
To keep me near His side;
I feel the rod; the pruning knife
Cuts deep into my lusty life,
My selfishness and pride.

He sweetly gives me strength to bear,
And trains and lifts with tender care,
Sends sun and rain and dew and air,
Life from the living root;
And thus my trial and my pain,
Bring but a lustier strength again;
The wounded vine-branch heals, and then
Bends rich with clustered fruit!

V.

PROTECTION.

The consideration of the relation which the Divine Husbandman bears to the Vine could scarcely be regarded as complete if it did not include a reference to His ceaseless watchfulness and His protecting care. He it is who hedges in the vineyard, walls it round, carefully mends the gaps and fills the vacant spaces through which the fox, the wild boar, or the midnight marauder might enter to spoil or ravage, to trample or destroy.

He it is also, who builds the lodge or tower amongst the vines, so that He may dwell among them, and from His high commanding outlook may keep a constant watch and ward; may see and know all that concerns His precious charge without intermission, leaving no possible danger of harmful intervention or surprise. He is not only the Proprietor, the Cultivator, the Trainer, the

Pruner of the Vine, but He is also its unwearied Guardian and its strong Protector too.

The first Christian missionaries, who braved the dangers of a residence among the cannibal Fijians, were threatened with destruction by the whole body of natives, and had no means of defence except prayer. Their enemies heard them praying, and fled away in a perfect panic of fear. Subsequently, one of them was asked why they fled. The answer is worth noting. "We found that you were praying to your God, and we know that your God is a strong God; and so we fled away."

"Your God is a strong God!" It is true, O Christian, gloriously and eternally true.

> "He is strong to deliver and good to redeem
> The weakest believer that hangs upon Him."

"Are you not afraid to live in this lonely place?" said a traveller to a poor woman who dwelt alone in a cottage on a lonely moor. "No," said she, "for faith closes the door at night, and mercy opens it in the morning." That shall be the experience of every one whose trust is in the Lord of Hosts, the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him. The psalmist may well call for a general song of trust and confidence in God, "Let all those

that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them!"

Let us endeavour daily to realise this gracious truth; the perfect safety, the absolute security from harm and evil of all those who have a living faith in Christ, who have the indwelling Spirit of God, and are trusting and serving their Heavenly Father with filial love and fear.

"God doth not leave His own;
The night of weeping for a time may last,
Then, tears all past,
His going forth shall as the morning shine,
The sunrise of His favour shall be thine;
God doth not leave His own.

"God doth not leave His own,
Though clouds may gloom, and peril may be near,
Though grief and fear
Come in the train of earth and hell's dark crowd,
The trusting heart says, even in the cloud,
God doth not leave His own.

"God doth not leave His own:
The sorrow in their life He doth permit,
Yea, chooseth it;
But never harm befals the good; alway
He guards His own upon their heavenward way,
And keeps them safe. Faith, hope and love all say,
'God never leaves His own.'"

To all whose thoughts are evil, to all whose deeds are dark and will not bear the light, to all who

carry bad secrets in their hearts that they fain would hide, the words of Hagar, "Thou God seest me," is full of tremendous warning and may well make the guilty conscience to quake with fear; but to the Christian whose heart is right with God, and who can say with Peter, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee," the words convey a cheering promise, gracious and tender and true. "He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold He that keepeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."

It is said of Alexander the Great that on one occasion when he was surrounded by danger and went in peril of his life, some one asked him how it was that he could sleep so soundly in his tent. "I sleep," said the king, "because Parmenio keeps guard." But what was Parmenio, in comparison with thy Guard, O faithful one? When HE giveth quietness, who can make trouble? "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep," said David in his peril and his exile among the caves of Gilead, "for thou, O Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety."

Whatever may transpire; in whatever straits they may be; however great may seem to be the believer's impending danger,

"They cannot harm, for God is there,"

And He Himself hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!"

"Father and Friend! Thy light, Thy love,
Beaming through all Thy works we see;
Thy glory gilds the heavens above,
And all the earth is full of Thee.

"Thy voice we hear, Thy presence feel,
Whilst Thou, too pure for mortal sight,
Involved in clouds invisible,
Reignest the Lord of life and might.

"We know not in what hallowed part
Of Thy wide heavens Thy throne may be,
But this we know, that where Thou art,
Power, wisdom, goodness dwell with Thee.

"Thy children shall not faint nor fear,
Sustained by this sufficient thought;
Since Thou, their God, art everywhere,
They cannot be where Thou art not!

"Thy arms are round them all the while,
Thine eye is on them all the way;
Thy power shall keep them, and Thy smile
Shall turn their darkest night to day!"

VI.

RESULTS.

As the natural and fitting outcome of all his toil and care, all his pains and labour, the husbandman comes in due season to pluck for himself the purple clusters that hang ripe and ready on the branches of his well-tended vine. The divine Husbandman regards His Vine with equal hope, and visits it in just expectation of the same results.

"Fruit, much fruit, more fruit." This is to be the outcome of life in Christ. By this means is the Father glorified, in that the living branches of the living Vine produce good fruit. In proportion, O Christian, to the abundance of your privilege, and the expenditure of cost and care in your cultivation, should be the measure of your return. Thou art graffed into a "noble Vine." Thou art placed in a choice climate and a "very fruitful hill." Thou art tended and cared for in bounteous fashion. Nowhere and on no one shines the sun more warmly,

falls the rain more plenteously, descends the dew more copiously, blows the breeze more freshly, toils the Vinedresser more zealously, more graciously, than on thee. What store of fruit oughtest thou to bear! The grapes of purest holiness to God, of highest service to thy fellow-men! Large grapes, ripe and sweet; grapes in clusters; so that the Husbandman, thy Owner, Tender, Trainer, Protector may pluck thy pleasant fruits of love and faith and duty, and press them into the cup of sacrifice and service that cheers the heart of God and man!

Ponder a moment, O reader, before this little book is laid aside. Ponder on the claims which the Husbandman hath upon thee. "What more could I have done unto my vineyard that I have not done?" That will be the question put to thee direct in the time of the grape-harvest. If then thou art found unfruitful, if thy branch is bare and barren when the season is past, what, I pray thee, will thine answer be? "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." How? Whither? But if, by the grace of God, you are fruitful; fruitful in good works, fruitful in holy thoughts and conversation, fruitful in real, high service to your kind, then is the "Father glorified," then is the Son, the True Vine, on which you grow, glori-

fied also: then is the good Spirit, who is your life, glorified; then in the harvest-home of God, you, too, shall be glorified; and in that day shall the Saviour's promise concerning you become perfectly fulfilled and eternally true; "my joy shall remain in you, and your joy shall be FULL!"

"Three instruments," saith an old writer, "doth the husbandman have in hand or in reserve for the vine according to its fruitfulness or its failure. First comes the spade wherewith he diggeth and looseneth, and manywise helps the growing; the spade wherewith he bringeth thereto the nourishing loam, or enriching soil, to refresh and cheer and strengthen the heart of it. Verily the spade may well stand for all the husbandman's bounty and labour and care. Then cometh the knife with which he pruneth, loppeth, and otherwise cutteth down the vine, that its juices may be the more compressed, and that it may be made more truly hale and more capable of bringing forth fruit that is good and commendable and in just sufficiency. The pruning-knife, in wise hands, worketh wonders for the grape-harvest. There is also in reserve, not to be produced except under pressure of strong occasion, the axe, by which the vine, if, despite the spade and the knife, and all the husbandman's witting, it

remaineth empty, may be cut down as a cumberer, cast into the fire, and the ground made clear for the implanting of a better tree."

The spade, the knife, the axe: three suggestive words: I would insert in the record a possible third as an alternative. After the spade, after the knife, representative of vine-dresser's skill and management and care, representative of time and season, —then comes the baskets to receive the clusters when they are fully ripe. Should persistent barrenness keep the basket empty, then comes the axe to lop off the branch, to relieve the vine of dead and useless weight, and the rejected bough must go to feed the fire.

The spade, the knife, the basket, the axe: Christian, how readest thou? If the basket be filled, if the Husband gathers the pleasant clusters, meet reward for His labour and care, then the spade shall transplant thee to the Upper Vineyard, where the True Vine is, and in that glorious Canaan of fertility, that clime of high perfection and delight, thy life and fruit and foliage shall be "even as the vines of Eshcol," and thy Beloved shall walk in His garden and gather His pleasant fruits. There, the knife will never be required, for there the clusters will never fail. There the axe will never be possible,

for life and fruit and foliage are all immortal—and Husbandman, Vine, and Branches are glorified together!

Let us remember, finally, that this is our Lord's latest parable; a sort of "last word" to His Church, to be remembered, solemnly pondered, tenderly reverenced, and lovingly obeyed.

"AND THIS I PRAY THAT YOUR LOVE MAY ABOUND YET MORE AND MORE IN KNOWLEDGE AND IN ALL JUDGMENT.

"THAT YE MAY APPROVE THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT; THAT YE MAY BE SINCERE AND WITHOUT OFFENCE TILL THE DAY OF CHRIST;

"BEING FILLED WITH THE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH ARE BY JESUS CHRIST UNTO THE GLORY AND THE PRAISE OF GOD."

"Lord I have lain,
Barren too long, and fain
I would redeem the time that I may be
Fruitful to Thee;
Fruitful in knowledge, faith, obedience,
Ere I go hence;
That when I come
At harvest to be reapèd and brought home,
Thine angels may
My soul in Thy celestial garner lay,
Where perfect joy and bliss
Eternal is.'

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